

The
**FROZEN
FORTUNE**

by
FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK





THE FROZEN FORTUNE



"I fought every inch of the way"

THE FROZEN FORTUNE

BY
FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK

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TORONTO
McLEOD & ALLEN
PUBLISHERS

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THE MACAULAY COMPANY

PRINTED BY
THE PREMIER PRESS
NEW YORK, U. S. A.

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THE FROZEN FORTUNE



The Frozen Fortune

CHAPTER I

FALSE COLOURS

THE luck turned, though I did not know it, when I met the red-haired man on the road to Vermilion. The colour might have warned me of gold and blood, and it brought enough of both. It brought more red metal than I have ever been able to use, and it brought such memories that I have hated my own red hair ever since, and have almost, but not quite, believed that it would have been better if I had never met the Irishman on the Vermilion stage road, and had never become involved in the fierce and blood-stained mesh of cruelty and greed that followed.

I was plodding along, about ten miles from town, when I perceived a line of dust rising

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above the road ahead. As it neared me it revealed a big man pushing a very tired horse into a lope.

I noticed that he looked hard at me as he approached, and when he had come nearer he suddenly pulled up, with our animals' heads almost touching. He was dressed like myself in rough miner's costume, but his felt hat-brim was looped up with some metal insignia, and his coat was thrown across his saddle-bow.

His hair was rather long, like my own, and was of the same unlovely shade of red. His heavy moustache matched mine too, and we were of much the same large build, but there ended the resemblance, such as it was.

The red-haired man gazed fixedly at me, and I at him, for my burro had stopped gladly. Finally he moved his horse a pace nearer, pushing back his hat, and the action gave me a glimpse of a pair of hard, blood-shot, greenish-grey eyes, like a wolf's.

"Good-afternoon to you, stranger!" he said in a curiously shrill voice with a hint of a

brogue in it, a thin voice, which did not match his bulk.

I replied civilly to the salutation and was about to ride on.

"Wait a bit," said the horseman. "I reckon we're the only two red-headed men on the trail to-day. No offense, stranger. Saints! we're as like as two pays."

"Not quite," I said. "It's only the hair."

"Well, but——" He continued to scan me up and down so curiously that I began to be annoyed. "Prospecting? Been in the hills long?"

"First time out for three weeks," I told him.

"You're going into Vermilion, maybe?"

I said that I was.

"I ought to go there too. I passed my word to be in town this afternoon, but I can't, no-how. Got to ride down to Osage."

He inspected me again with interest.

"Say, would you have time to make ten dollars? It's just a package of papers I want

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you to deliver at the office of the Blackfoot Mine."

I was about to say that I would deliver it for nothing, when I recollected that ten dollars would buy a good deal of pork and flour, and I nodded.

"Then here's five dollars down," said the stranger, "and here's a receipt for the other five." He scribbled on a bit of paper with a pencil. "They'll give you the money at the office if you hand them this. And here's what I want you to deliver," he went on, taking a large sealed official envelope from his pocket. "It's just papers, no good to any one but me and the Blackfoot people."

I pocketed the package, the note and the five-dollar bill.

"And, look you," he continued. "They don't hardly know me by sight at the office, and they'll probably think you're me. That's what I want them to think, I'm telling you straight. You see, I promised to bring this package in myself, and if they think I've

done it, why, that's where you earn your ten dollars."

I was not much pleased with this explanation, but it seemed no very serious matter after all, and I agreed.

"And yet another thing," said the red-haired man. "We're about of a size, and you must change hats with me."

He leaned over, deftly lifted off my hat and replaced it with his own, before I could stop him.

"That's all. Good-bye, and good luck!" he shouted, and was off in a cloud of dust.

I had to look vainly after him, for there was no use in setting my burro in pursuit. But I was filled with suspicion and dislike. Why should he wish me to personate him? I thought it smelt of fraud.

The paper he had given me was simply a receipt for five dollars signed "J. C. Dolan." But I reflected that I could easily prove my real identity if necessary, and I needed the ten dollars. So I concluded not to look too

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closely into the matter, but to perform my duties as messenger, and ask no questions.

So I rode on, reaching Vermilion late in the afternoon. As I ascended the stony main street of the town, which climbs at a grade that would astound an Easterner, I noticed that the place seemed unusually full of men, and that there was some excitement in the air.

I attributed this to the shutting down of the mines, and paid no attention to the crowds, though I seemed to be the object of a good deal of curiosity myself. But I set it down to my fearfully dusty and wilderness-worn appearance, and I rode straight to the office of the Blackfoot Mine. It was a handsome building, much resembling a bank, situated on the main street; I hitched my burro and went in.

At the wicket marked "Cashier" I shoved in the sealed envelope.

"I want to leave this here," I said.

"All right. What is it?" said the cashier, looking surprised.

"And I want to get five dollars," I added, giving him the receipt.

He glanced at the paper, looked quickly back at me, and his expression changed.

"Why certainly, Mr. Dolan," he said effusively, shoving out the money. "I didn't know you at first. Things quiet to-day?"

I mumbled something and turned to go, oppressed by my false colours.

"Won't you wait a minute?" said the cashier. "I know Mr. Crawford will want to see you." He ran back through the office crying, "Mr. Crawford! Here's Mr. Dolan!"

I had no desire whatever to see Mr. Crawford, but I heard a sudden exclamation, the sound of a chair being pushed hastily back, and a man came out into the corridor by a door marked "Private." He was an elderly, anxious-looking gentleman, and I expected to be instantly exposed. But he looked at me in a doubtful way, and said interrogatively, "Mr. Dolan?"

I muttered some sort of assent.

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"You must excuse me if I didn't know you. You know you've never been around this office," he cried with a great show of cordiality which rang false. "Believe me, I've never had the pleasure of meeting you. Man, you've got nerve! I admire you. The town's like a wasps' nest. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know exactly," I stammered. But I wanted to get away at once.

"I'd advise you to be careful," he went on, looking uneasily out the window. "Are you going to be in town all day? We may want to communicate with you. Where can we find you for the next hour or two? Shall I 'phone you at Mr. Ranon's?"

"I'll go and sit in the Palace Saloon, a couple of blocks down the street. You can find me there," I said, and hurried away.

My entrance into the saloon produced an effect that astonished and alarmed me. Men glanced sideways at me, whispered and glanced again, and there seemed to be hostility in their faces. Yet no one spoke to me or offered any provocation, as I seated myself at

little table in the remotest corner of the bar.

I was ashamed to leave the place at once and I sat there for perhaps fifteen minutes, wondering who this man Dolan might be, and what profit or peril I was going to gain by personating him. My personation was certainly successful, so successful that I did not intend to continue it much longer. The hostile, curious eyes on every side made me nervous, and I was about to go out when a bare-headed young man hurried into the saloon.

I thought I had seen him at the office. He glanced searchingly about, then came over to me, dropped a note on the table and hurried out without uttering a word; but there was fear in his face.

I tore the note open. It read:

"Town getting too hot for you. Better get out and lie low. Shall I send you any money?"

"CRAWFORD."

It was an opportunity of replenishing my

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treasury, but I did not want any more money—from that quarter. I was growing thoroughly frightened. Some movement which I did not understand was on foot, and it seemed that I had unconsciously involved myself in it. I got up and started back to the Blackfoot office, determined to give back the five dollars and clear up the misunderstanding.

As I crossed the street some one hooted. I looked back, and a stone flew past me. A crowd was collected, staring at me, and I could almost see an excited whisper run through it. The note was right. The town was getting hot—over something.

I strode into the mine offices resolutely, and met Crawford in the corridor. He threw up his hands in affright when he saw me.

“Good God! what are you here for?” he cried. “Didn’t you get my note? What’s the matter? Want any money? Here, give me a hundred dollars!” he snapped to the cashier, and he crammed the package of bills into my breast pocket without looking at

them. "What are you waiting for? Man, the town's on fire!"

"I'm not Dolan!" I blurted out.

"What! Then who are you? No, that won't work. You've been spotted. Why, you've got the badge on your hat. My God! here come the lynchers!"

In fact, I too heard from the street the hoarse roar and clamour of an excited mob, coming nearer, and the tramp and shuffle of hundreds of feet.

"They'll wreck the offices!" exclaimed Crawford, who was white to the lips. "You can't stay here."

He seized me by the shoulders, and before I could resist he had fairly run me out the door and down the steps to the street.

"Out you go! Look out for yourself!" he snarled, and I thought I heard "damn you!" as the door slammed and locked behind me.

A mighty howl, a blast of yells and curses struck me in the face as I reached the sidewalk. A dozen stones flew past, and I heard the splintering crash of the office windows.

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A mob of several hundred men was pouring down the street. They looked like miners; they carried clubs, drills, picks, guns, and a man in front swung a long rope. It was for me, that rope. The yells that greeted my appearance left no doubt of it. My burro was still hitched in front of the office, but there was no time to mount. I ran for my life.

There is something utterly paralysing in the inhuman fury of a mob. I had encountered a good many dangers before, but nothing had ever given me the sick terror that now saturated my whole body. My legs felt benumbed as I ran.

I heard a couple of pistol-shots, and then cries of "Don't shoot him. Hang the butcher!" I swerved off at the first side street, hoping to dodge into some alley or back yard, but no such refuge presented itself. I did not know the geography of the town, and I had no idea which way to turn. The scattered van of the mob was gaining upon me with the most diabolical uproar, when I came suddenly out upon a wide, level street, shaded

with fine trees and built up with handsome dwellings. Surely some of these mansions would protect me, and I fled toward them. But as I turned the corner a stone hit me hard on the back. I staggered, almost fell upon my face, and before I could recover myself the lynchers were upon me like a swarm of maddened bees.

Something struck me on the head, and I saw red lights. A big miner, his face sweating and distorted, swung an iron crowbar at me, and I wrenched it out of his hands and beat them back with it for an instant. When a man is fairly at bay it is astonishing how he can fight for his life, and I managed to clear a space in front, but they swarmed at me from behind.

Nothing but my unusual physical strength enabled me to keep my feet so long. The blood was running into my eyes from a cut on my forehead. I was almost at the end of my breath and strength when I saw, over the heads of my murderers, a handsome carriage moving slowly through the outskirts of the

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press. It must have become suddenly entangled in the mob, and was unable to get out. It was only a few yards away, and in it sat the most beautiful woman I ever saw. Even in that desperate moment I felt a shock of admiration. She was scarcely more than a girl, but full-blown with a Spanish luxuriance. I saw it all at a glance—her skin creamy as a magnolia bud, her eyes great and black, and masses of black hair piled under her white hat. She was dressed all in white, she held a white parasol, and she looked down with the most superb indifference at the jam of howling miners around her carriage. The coachman was pale and frightened, leaning forward and trying to sooth the uneasy horses, but she sat still, with a sort of regal unconsciousness of the brutal mêlée that surged round her carriage wheels.

I saw all this in a flash, at a glance, as I battled. And I thought that if I could reach that carriage she could not refuse me help. She could whip up the horses, break through the mob and get clear. I redoubled my efforts,

and fought like a madman to gain the centre of the street. The carriage rolled slowly up; it was passing me, but it was six feet away. I could not reach it.

I cast an imploring glance at the woman. She met it full. She looked straight into my desperate eyes with a gaze of the most icy unconcern, except that a faint smile of contempt—or was it satisfaction?—curved her red lips.

CHAPTER II

THE "BONANZA"

JUST how I happened to be on the road to Vermilion involves a chain of circumstances that I do not care to recollect too clearly. There was nothing particularly disgraceful in the way I had spent the past ten years, but there was a good deal of folly and a fair amount of bad luck. I suppose I should have been practising law in Seattle and getting some returns from a legal education that had cost my father a great deal of money; but instead I had been a gold-hunter in Idaho, a surveyor in Dakota, and, it must be admitted, rather a failure everywhere. And I was not even a spectacular failure.

Such a character drifts into journalism as naturally as a pugilist takes to saloon-keeping, and I happened to come into Mendocino, California, with a little money. I did a sensible thing for once. I bought a half interest

in the local weekly, the *Bonanza*, determined for once to get something tangible for my money.

The *Bonanza* was managed and owned by its editor, Philip Gordon—"Pill" Gordon, the best friend I shall ever know. But the paper had seen better days—vivid days when the golden flood ran high tide through Smith County, when copies sold for a dollar apiece at the mines, and when it was fiery with the violent metaphor and picturesque abuse that was supposed to be the proper thing for Western journalism. Men had come into the office with six-shooters in quest of apologies, or, preferably, blood. More than one editor had died with his boots on, and the report of his own pistol the last sound in his ears, and more than one had kept his private burying-ground. But the exhaustion of the mines had done what the bullets of the bad men had failed to do. Goldendale had declined, and the *Bonanza* had declined with it, sinking to a dull, inoffensive country weekly relying largely upon "boiler-plate."

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But Pill Gordon still believed in the *Bonanza* and in the future of Goldendale with the fanatical local pride of the West. His hope was to see Goldendale a metropolis, the *Bonanza* a daily, and himself, I believe, state senator. As at least the first two of these ambitions were shared by all his fellow-townsmen he never came to realize their pathetic absurdity. Everyone was insane with him, except, perhaps, myself and his sister Jessie.

She was several years older than Pill, and they lived alone together in a rambling house on Goldendale's outskirts, where she took care of him in a maternal fashion. I spent a good deal of my spare time there, but it was more than propinquity that made me fall in love.

It scarcely occurred to me to ask myself whether she was pretty. She was a girl of California in every inch, tall, like her brother, her skin like the pale gold of the wheat, and with big, luminous brown eyes. In the orchard behind the house she had an apiary of fifty hives of Italian bees, which were her greatest delight, and all her move-

ments had the quiet deliberation that she may have learned in dealing with those insects. I can see her at this moment, as I first saw her, moving slowly among the white-painted hives under the wide branches of apple and peach, where the air was full of the hurrying bees, and heavy with the rich smell of honey and wax.

I helped her whenever I could find an excuse, in spite of stings, and I made an excuse pretty often. Presently I became immune to the stings, but not to the more delicious poison. I became an enthusiastic apiarist, less from interest in the bees than in the beekeeper. We spent hours in watching the colonies, and in technical discussion of queens, hives, frames and foundation. We were all hard up, short of money, with the *Bonanza* as usual staggering on the edge of unspeakable gulfs and carrying all our money and everything that we could mortgage, but when I think of those quiet days in the most poetic of out-door occupations and the mildest of journalism, I am tempted to think them the

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happiest of my life. Whether they were or not, they could not last.

We had been spending more money on the paper than I thought wise; Pill had an idea that a better paper would increase our circulation. Then, on the almost certainty of a large job-printing contract, we had purchased a new press, which further necessitated the purchase of a gasoline engine to run it, instead of the customary mule. This press had broken down two weeks after it was installed; we had had to get an expert from San Francisco; finally had to exchange it. Our circulation had not obviously increased, and, worse than all, we had failed to get the expected contract.

The *Bonanza's* plant and Pill's house were both mortgaged to the last dollar, but somehow Pill had raised a loan of six thousand dollars on our note. How he had persuaded the bank to accept any more of our paper was a mystery which only he could explain. He had engineered the transaction, and he had given me only the vaguest details.

Something about the affair was troubling him seriously, however. From the kindest and most jovial of good fellows he had grown abstracted, moody, sometimes harsh. Jessie was much grieved because he would not eat enough, and I because he was drinking too much. It was not one of his bad habits, and I thought it indicated desperation.

Jessie did not know of the drink, but she divined the desperation, and grew pale with anxiety. I did not venture to speak to her of the matter, till she opened the subject herself. We were in the orchard, as usual, where the apple-blossoms, just opening, were full of Jessie's bees.

"Phil's awfully worried," she said suddenly. "Do you know what the matter is?"

"Not exactly," I replied. "Business, of course——"

"The paper is in difficulties?" she asked, quickly.

When was the *Bonanza* not in difficulties? I thought, but I did not say it.

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"It seems to me that Pill wants to expand too much," I said instead. "There's only a limited amount of newspaper business here, after all."

"But we're going to increase it, aren't we?" she answered. "We're going to make Goldendale what it was in fifty-five."

I glanced at her ironically.

"Yes, Phil's committed to that programme," she insisted, "and I'm with him, heart and soul, in whatever he does."

"All right. I'm in it heart and soul too, then," I said, cheerfully.

"Why? Your interests are not all in Goldendale, like ours."

"Yes, they are. The greatest interests I have in the world are here," I exclaimed, catching at the opportunity. "And the greatest hopes."

"You mean that the paper——"

"No, I don't mean the paper. I mean—I mean that you are the only person—you are all I care for on earth. All my interests are in you, and all my hopes, and all my life. I

know that I've got nothing to offer you now, but——"

"Don't," she interrupted, gently. "You're talking foolishly."

I stopped short, taken aback.

"But it's a fact," I recovered myself to say. "I've got nothing to offer you, but I love you, and I want you to tell me, Jessie, if I've got any chance at all—if you care for me at all."

"If I did, do you think it would matter what you had to offer me, as you call it," she answered, turning half away, and my heart sank. "Don't you know me yet?" she added, turning back again, and I caught a look in her eyes that thrilled me.

"Do you care for me at all, then?"

"Don't you know?" she said, turning quickly away once more, but she did not resist when I drew her back and what we said next is no one's business.

"But Phil!" she exclaimed at last. "I can't desert Phil."

"There's no need. Phil can live with us." But she shook her head.

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"Phil's having a hard fight now, and he needs all the love and care that I can give him. He needs me more than you do. You know that I couldn't abandon him, now."

I argued this new obstacle with her vainly, almost jealous of Pill.

"Well, but when Pill doesn't need you—when the paper is booming, and he has made his pile?" I demanded.

"Then, I suppose it would be different—for I will always love you, whatever happens," she murmured.

"Then, by thunder, the paper is going to boom. Watch me boom it!" I exclaimed.

I went down to the office half an hour later with a spirit for any enterprise. I had a dozen schemes for expanding our fortunes. I would make the *Bonanza* the best paper in California; I would make Goldendale a great city, and Pill a legislator. I would have undertaken to make him President. I burst into the office and slung my hat on the table. Pill was there, moodily chewing the stem of an

unlighted pipe, and his face somehow took the exuberance out of me.

Our office was in the centre of a block of brick stores on the Square, and Pill and I used a rather small room on the ground floor, separated from the street by only a great plate-glass window. From the sidewalk we could thus be observed any day at our labours on opposite sides of a long table, presumably moulding the destinies of Goldendale. Pill considered this publicity of work a great advertisement for the paper, and perhaps it was. It made me feel like a window display, and I always retreated to a corner of the composing-room when I had any serious writing to do.

"Dick, have you any prospects anywhere outside of Goldendale?" Pill ejaculated at me when I came in.

"Not that I know of. Why?" I asked, with my effervescence subsiding rapidly.

"Because," said Pill, "if we can't raise six or seven thousand before July we'll break—bust—go under and never come up again."

I was appalled at the amount. I had

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fancied that it might be a question of a quarter of that sum, though I had lately been afraid to cast up our liabilities. We had never made seven thousand dollars' profit in our best years, and how we were to do it in three months was a problem. Nor could I conceive how we had become so deeply involved.

"But how do we come to be so much in the hole?" I exclaimed.

Pill muttered something about heavy expenses and bills.

"Well, suppose we do bust. Nobody minds a little thing like that on the Coast, and we can make a fresh start," I suggested.

"It isn't that, God! If it was no more than that!" Pill burst out, fixing me with a desperate eye. "But it's disgrace, Dick. It's the law. It's San Quentin penitentiary, if not for us, then for somebody else."

"Here, sit down, and let's have the whole story," I said. "This is no time to lose your nerve. Do you mean anything in particular, or are you drunk?"

"It's bound to come," replied Pill, "unless we can work miracles. I raised six thousand dollars three months ago, you know, for our new press and things."

"I wondered that the bank would let us have it," I remarked.

"They wouldn't—not without another name on the note. Well, I got one. I rode out to Johnnie Oliver's ranch and told him about the fix we were in. After Johnnie had listened to the whole story, he thought a while and then finally said:

"See here, Pill. It sure looks as if you boys would go plumb broke if you can't raise the dough. And if you can, you've got a cinch, with that big printing contract. But Pill, my name isn't good for another dollar at the bank. I've borrowed so much money from them now that they won't stand another raise. You know that if I had the cash, I couldn't give it to you quick enough—not since you jumped into the crick at the time of the big freshet and pulled my kid out just as he was going under the last time.' Johnnie

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always remembers that. 'But I'll tell you what I'll do,' he went on. 'Give me the note and I'll see if I can't get old Bill Hollis to go on with me—his name's good for anything he's willing to sign it to—and I guess he'll do it.'

"Sure enough, next day Johnnie rode up to the office and handed me the note, with his name and old Bill's across the back. I took it over to the bank and they only looked at it once. We got the money, and then—well, you know what happened. I thought I had made sure of getting that contract," said poor Pill. "We had to have the new press. And then they threw us down on the contract. What with repairs to the presses and everything, the money went—I hardly know where. So, when I saw how things stood, I let Johnnie know that we weren't going to be able to meet the note. He turned pale for a moment, and then he told me." Pill stopped and looked piteously at me.

"Dick," he groaned, "old Hollis never saw that note. Johnnie knew we were busted

if we couldn't raise the money and—he forged Hollis' endorsement. It's bound to come out, unless we can work miracles."

I stared at him, hardly believing.

"And what's become of the note?" I managed to ask.

"The bank has it, of course. Hollis doesn't know anything about it, but on the third of July, three months from now, it will be presented, dishonoured, and the whole thing will come out."

I thought hard for a few minutes.

"Brace up, old man!" I cried, hitting him over the back. "We've got to get Johnnie out of this mess, and ourselves too, by hook or crook, if we mortgage the rest of our lives. I'll stand by you, and we'll buy that note off before it falls due."

"Well, what plan can you think of?" said Pill, rousing a little.

"Dashed if I can think of anything," I admitted, and we sat for a long time in silence, staring mechanically through the window at the Square. Acquaintances passed on the side-

walk, nodded at us through the window, and Pill returned their salutations without, I am sure, being conscious of seeing them.

"We can't raise six thousand dollars in the newspaper business in three months—no, nor half of it," Pill remarked at last.

"Nothing but luck can help us. Play the wheat market," I suggested.

"I'd sooner play the races. Do you want us to lose another six thousand—that we haven't got?"

"Does Jessie know?" I suddenly demanded, struck by a new possibility of horror.

"Do you think I could tell her a thing like that?" Pill answered, and there was another long silence, while we stared through the window again.

"You see there's no use. The thing's bound to come out. Well, let's get out the paper while we can," said Pill at last, and he turned to his work with unexpected stoicism.

I tried to assume an appearance of labour also, but I am afraid the paper would have been late that week if it had depended on my

industry. Pill scarcely spoke again. We were a silent pair of partners that day; and in the evening when I got back to the hotel where I boarded I sat down prepared to spend the evening in threshing the matter out.

But the more I thought of it the less I could see any safe way out of the difficulty. I went over and over in my mind the various ways in which seven thousand dollars might be made in three months without capital. There were not many of them, and they were all highly hazardous; but the mines seemed the only one that offered the ghost of a chance.

Even that was a slim one. But I had once hunted for gold in Idaho. I had called myself a prospector, and I had once located a claim which I had sold for eight hundred dollars. The incident had made a great impression on me, and I had preserved an idea that I could repeat it whenever it should be necessary. This is the invariable delusion of the gold-seeker, and it departs only with life.

I went to bed at three o'clock in the morning, and when I saw Pill six hours later I

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asked him, "How much money have we in cash?"

"Three or four hundred dollars," he answered.

I noticed that he looked as if he had slept rather less than I had.

"Could you let me have half of it? Could you run the paper on credit for a while?"

"I might. But what are you going to do?"

"Klondike," I replied, succinctly.

His face brightened.

"You're the right sort!" he exclaimed. "We'll fight it to the last ditch. But two hundred dollars wouldn't be any use to you in the Alaska diggings. It wouldn't last any time."

"Well, but since I can't have any more—"

Pill reflected for a few minutes.

"I think I can let you take three hundred," he said. "But don't go to Alaska. I can put you on to something better—cheaper, anyway, and nearer home. There have been big strikes made lately in the Snake River country, in northern Idaho. I got it straight from

a fellow who has just been there. There isn't a rush yet, but there will be one. Go up there and get in on the ground floor. It's a quartz-mining country, and you'll have to depend on locating some good claims and selling them quick. But it's a wild-goose chase at the best," Pill added, "and it's a hundred to one against your finding anything inside the time limit."

"I'll count on a fool's luck," I said, cheerfully. "And I'll start to-night."

"Yes, no use waiting. There's no time to lose. But look here, if you don't find anything, don't come back. Bury yourself in the hills somewhere till it's over."

"I think I see myself doing that!" said I. "Get the money for me and I'll pack my grip. You'll see me back before July."

But the farewell to Jessie was what I dreaded most. I had to tell her what I was going to do without telling why I was going to do it, but I managed it after a fashion.

"We must make or break by the end of

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June," I told her, to wind up a blundering explanation. "I'll be back before then. The paper is in worse trouble than you fancied, Jessie. Be good to Pill, and don't ask him questions. I'm going to do all that I can. Remember always that I love you, and wish me good luck."

She put her arms round my neck.

"All my love goes with you. May it bring you good luck!" she whispered in my ear.

It was my farewell to Goldendale. Three days later I was in Vermilion, Idaho, near the Oregon border.

Vermilion was a town of considerable importance at that time, being the residence of many wealthy mine owners. The mines themselves were mostly from eight to twenty miles back in the mountains, connected with the town by a spur line of railway, and they were just then in a disturbed condition by reason of a strike, as I learned before I had been long in the town. There had been the usual amount of stupidity on one side and obstinacy on the other, it appeared, and it had come to some

rioting, a good deal of smashing of breakable mine property, and one dynamite explosion.

The trouble seemed to centre round the Blackfoot, the largest and richest mine in the district, owned by Mr. Luis Ranon, and there was bitter talk of this gentleman's Spanish propensity to treat his men like dogs. The fact that Ranon did not operate his mine himself, but had leased it to a Sacramento company, did not seem to make any difference to these critics.

But I did not take any great amount of interest in the trouble though it was the only talk at Vermilion. I was too impatient to be about my own business, and I purchased a burro, a hundred pounds of provisions, tools and prospector's apparatus, and started into the hills without delay.

The story of my operations for the next three weeks is too monotonous and depressing to tell. The private information of big strikes may have come to Pill "straight," but it was certainly exaggerated, and there were no signs

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yet of a coming rush. I camped, moved camp, dug, pulverised rock and washed out panfuls of débris, and sometimes I found colour and sometimes not, but never in any encouraging quantity. The successful prospector must combine infinite patience with infinite hope, and I was totally lacking in the former essential.

My patience continued to evaporate for three weeks, and then my supply of provisions ran out.

I saw myself obliged to go back to Vermilion to purchase more, and it would take almost my last dollar. My next expedition, then, was my last stake. It would have to win, for Pill could spare me no more money. I might have got a job in the mines myself and worked long enough to accumulate a fresh stake if I had had unlimited time, but it was precisely time that was most precious to us.

However, I cached my outfit safely in the hills, and set out for Vermilion, riding my

THE "BONANZA"

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jackass. I struck the stage road about ten miles from town and there I met the red-haired man—the man who nearly caused my death, and was the only thing means of my salvation.

CHAPTER III

THE SENORITA

WHEN the girl in the carriage passed me, as I fought in the street at Vermilion, such inhuman, incredible indifference to my agony made me boil with a despairing rage that I had not felt before, and I screamed a curse straight into her face. She must have heard me above all the uproar, for she turned suddenly. Her face changed; she stared, then, snatching the whip from the frightened driver, she lashed the horses. They plunged, clearing a space round them, and the carriage swerved and reeled toward me. I leaped toward it, and the girl seized me by the coat with a man's grip and hauled me in.

The mob bellowed and surged back upon the carriage in a mass. The girl lashed the horses again till they reared, but half a dozen men had them by the bridles.

Somebody shot one of the horses. The

other stumbled, partly dragged down, and the carriage capsized. We were shot out into the crowd. I hit out wildly at the red, infuriated faces that swarmed upon me, but it would have been of no use if I had had the strength of Goliath. Blows fell from every side; men were climbing over the carriage behind me, when unexpectedly it seemed to me that the press began to thin out.

I saw faces turned away from me in alarm, and suddenly a horse's head was poked almost into my face. Upon his back sat a man hitting out with a loaded whip-butt. There were a score of others with him, forcing back the mob. I realised vaguely that it must be the police.

"Is Dolan hurt much?" I heard one of the officers inquire, pausing near the carriage, where I leaned breathless.

"This isn't Dolan," replied the girl, with remarkable equanimity, considering her recent experience. Her dress was torn, I noticed dizzily, and her hair was tumbling on her shoulders.

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The officer looked queerly at her, and made no answer.

"My name is Shields—prospecting——" I tried to say, and then the earth seemed to rise over my head in a soft cloud, and I lost consciousness of the girl, the police and the scattered mob alike.

Through the dimness of stupor I had a sensation of the vibration of a carriage again, that I was being carried somewhere, and then I seemed to doze till I struggled back to life with the fiery flavour of brandy filling my mouth.

I was in a great, dimly-lighted room. I was lying on a couch, and a fearfully wrinkled old woman was feeding the spirit into my lips with a spoon.

"Yet a little more," she crooned, with a villainous Mexican accent, as I opened my eyes and tried to raise myself.

I took a little more, and felt life and recollection rushing back warmly upon me.

"Where am I?" was my first and most natural question.

"In the house of Don Luis Ranon, *Señor.*"

The name sounded familiar to me, but I had to search my disconcerted wits before its connection came to me.

"What! The owner of the Blackfoot Mine?" I cried.

"Si, *Señor*, surely."

"But there was a young lady, wasn't there? Who was she?"

"*Caramba!* Certainly his daughter, the *Señorita Ines Maria Immaculata.*"

This was a bit of news upon which I had time to reflect while the antique Mexican washed and sponged my cuts and bruises with great skill, and applied sticking-plaster to my face and hands. I was badly bruised; there were very sore spots on my legs and back and ribs, but no bones seemed to be broken, and when I had swallowed a little more brandy I felt almost as well as ever. It was lucky, for I would have to get out of Vermilion at once. There was a too fixed impression abroad that I was Dolan.

And I recurred to the question of who this mysteriously hated Dolan was.

"Since you know so much," I said to my nurse, "perhaps you can tell me who is Mr. Dolan."

The old woman turned a glance of shrewd intelligence upon me and chuckled harshly. She might have been about to speak when the door opened.

"The Señorita Maria Immaculata!" she exclaimed, gathering up the implements of her ministrations, and scuttling away.

The *señorita* came in. She had changed her dress, and was all in black now, and her gorgeous beauty glowed like a live coal.

"I don't know how to thank you, *señorita*," I began, stammering, for the sight of her magnificence almost tied my tongue.

"Call me Miss Ranon," she interrupted. "I'm an American girl. I was born in this State. My father is a Spaniard, though—oh, a Spaniard indeed. A grandee of old Castile and the owner of the Blackfoot Mine, as I dare say you know. I dare say, too, that you

know as much about the mine as he does, for he doesn't operate it. He leases it to a—a sort of company. He doesn't know the first thing about mining. He collects rare books, especially old Bibles. He would have welcomed you to his house, only that he's in San Francisco, hunting for Bibles."

She ran on thus, evidently to spare my weakness and to put me at my ease, but I was desperately impatient to get at the clue to all these happenings.

"You are very kind," I said, "and you have more nerve than any woman I ever saw. Now can you tell me who this man Dolan is, and why they tried to lynch me to-day? By the way," I added, hastily, "I should have told you that my name is Richard Shields, of Goldendale, California, and I've been prospecting in the mountains back of here."

"The answer to your second question, Mr. Shields, is easy. The miners tried to lynch you because they took you for Dolan, though there's no great resemblance. It's true, though, that I mistook you for him too, at

first, when you were so covered with dust and blood. It was your voice that undeceived me. That wasn't a very polite thing that you called at me—do you remember?—but it saved your life. Dolan has a voice like a cat."

"But who is this Dolan? What has he done?" I insisted.

"Haven't you heard of it? They're calling it the 'Blackfoot Massacre' already. Dolan used to be a low lawyer in Sacramento, and a sort of cheap political boss. Then—I don't wish to tell you how—he secured the management of the legal affairs of our mine. He has done it well, I understand. But now the men are on strike. It would have blown over, but what does Dolan do but bring a gang of ruffians from Sacramento, whom he called his deputies. When the strikers began to smash a little glass at the mine he opened fire with repeating rifles, and when they broke and ran there were ten bodies on the ground. There were two or three women and children among them."

"The butcher!" I ejaculated, hotly. I no longer blamed the mob.

"Yes, that's what they're calling him. Of course the women and children had no business to be there, but it stirred up the mines like a hornets' nest. They mobbed Dolan's gang, and if they could have caught Dolan himself they'd have burned him at the stake, I suppose. The mines are sure to be shut down for six months now, and all through his foolishness."

She spoke with a hard indifference to the butchery which I took to be assumed, and I told her of my own meeting with Dolan on the Vermilion road, and of the suicidal errand I had undertaken.

"That was like Clarence Dolan," she commented. "He counted on your paying the piper for him, thinking that he'd be at Sacramento, I suppose, before the mistake was discovered."

"You seem to know him well," I remarked.

The girl smiled singularly.

"Oh, yes, I know him well," she replied, with a curious meaning in her tone that matched her smile. Her left hand moved nervously. I glanced at it; there was a diamond on the fourth finger.

She smiled at me again.

"You are very quick," she remarked.

I stared back at her, unable to take her words in the sense that seemed indicated.

"You don't mean"—I hesitated, and stopped, realising that what I was about to suggest was monstrous.

"Yes, I do mean it," she said. "It's no secret. He has spread the news everywhere—to make it surer, I suppose."

"That you are——" I stumbled again.

"Yes."

At the first moment I had a sharp pang of jealousy of the red-haired Irishman; then the slow horror grew upon me that it was when she believed me to be Dolan that she had been apparently pleased to see me murdered. The Irishman was not so much to be envied after all!

I gazed at her incredulously, believing in some mistake, afraid to say what was in my mind.

"I know what you're thinking," she exclaimed. "But you don't know, and nobody knows but me, just how things stand."

"But you're going to marry him?" I ventured.

"Never in the world!" Her eyes suddenly blazed. "I am engaged to him—yes. I keep him at arm's length, and gain time. To-day I thought I was rid of him for good."

"Then why not break off the engagement?" I asked, bewildered.

"I can't. Why not? That would be too long a story. The man has a certain power—oh, he is not stupid! I can't free myself of him at present, but I won't marry him."

"You don't love him."

"It isn't that," she said, impatiently. "Of course, I don't love him, but it isn't that. I aim at higher things. I have a religion, you know—the religion of success. I don't care who knows it. I'm the sort of woman to be

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a force, and I'm going to be one. I know very well that I'm one of the handsomest women in the West, and I'll be one of the richest when I get my rights. Then I'll be one of the most powerful. I don't collect Bibles. I'm going to do something else with my life. If I were only a man—but I'm going to make a good thing of it as it is."

"I believe you," I said, with entire conviction, but weakly, for my head swam.

I had had too many violent emotions and adventures for one afternoon. I tried to speak, mumbled, and sank into the cushions, and once more unconsciousness flowed over me like a cloud.

When I came to myself I was still lying upon the couch, and I could not at first recollect how I had come there. The room was dim, and I was aware of a strange, violent murmur like a distant sea, which I took to be the humming of my own disturbed head. I turned over, and saw the *señorita* reading by a shaded electric light, and then comprehension returned. I sat up. The windows

were protected by heavy shutters, and on the floor I noticed splinters of broken glass. Night had evidently come on, so I must have been in a stupor, or slumber, for some time.

"Do you feel better? You've been sleeping for hours," said Miss Ranon, coming toward me as I stirred.

I was about to say that I felt much better, when something thumped heavily against the wooden window-shutter, and there was a jingle of glass.

"What's that?" I cried.

"Only a stone," the girl explained, with much poise of manner. "There's another mob outside. They think Dolan is in the house."

"Then I'll get out at once," said I. "You can show them that nobody is here, and they'll go away. I won't have your house wrecked on my account."

"Oh, the police can keep them back, I think," she replied. "They'd catch you if you tried to leave the house. You'll stay here as long as you like."

I got up, somewhat painfully. I was very

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sore and stiff, but I felt greatly refreshed by my dead slumber, and I went to the window to look out.

"You mustn't open the blinds!" cried Miss Lacs. "Not with the lights burning. You'll be shot at instantly. We've darkened all the windows but there have been plenty of stones thrown, and a few bullets after all. Wait! I'll turn off the light, if you want to look out."

There was a click, and the room was dark. I drew the heavy curtains aside, and peeped through the splintered shutters. Under the glare of the arc lights on the street stood a crowd of several hundred men, shouting, waving and flourishing weapons. No doubt they included most of my lynching party of the afternoon, and the clamour of their wrath was the distant murmur I had heard. But now they seemed to be paying no attention to the house than to a dark, silent group of police drawn up on the sidewalk. Evidently the mob had not wrought itself up to the point of making a rush. Whether the p

back the rush, when it did come, was
a matter, and a doubtful one.

Good heavens, how they must hate that
man!" I exclaimed, drawing back with a
start. "They'll have his blood." And
upon me that it was my blood
was wanted.

No use in talking about it," I said.
I got away from here at once.
I left my house if they don't find me,
they'll hang me if they do."

"Do as you like," said the *señorita*, shrugging
her pretty shoulders. "If it were I, I
wouldn't let them bluff me so. Look here,
have you any idea what way Dolan has
gone?"

I said that I had not.

"I've told you a good deal, I hardly know
why," she went on, "unless it was our uncon-
ventional introduction. Somehow, I had a
feeling that you could help me."

"I hope I can," I said. "I owe you my
life."

She carefully readjusted the curtains and

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turned on the light again. It showed a set, intense look on the beautiful face she turned to me.

"You must hate that man Dolan, too," she remarked.

"I've no cause to love him, certainly. I'd gladly see him hanged—legally."

"It would be worth a good deal to me—more than you can understand—if he never came back. I'd give anything to know that he was dead. When I say 'anything,' I mean—let's say twenty thousand dollars."

For a moment I failed to take her meaning. When I grasped the hideous proposition she had made I glared at her, and she looked back unabashed for a second.

"Oh, you don't understand!" she exclaimed passionately. "I made a mistake. I didn't mean to offer you blood-money; you're not that sort of man. But Dolan is a reptile—a devil! The earth is weary of him. He has me in his power to—well, he could make me a beggar if he chose, and if I were a man, just for one hour, I'd end it all."

The woman's fascination was so powerful that I had already forgotten the ferocious proposal she had made a moment ago. I looked at her, and I was full of eager pity.

She came closer and raised her lovely face to mine.

"I'd kill him myself!" she breathed. "I tried to, once. He knows it, and it only gave him a stronger hold on me. I am afraid of him, too; that is the sickening part of it. I hate and fear and abhor and despise him so that I could die. What can I do?"

Her face almost touched mine, her dark eyes on fire.

"What can I do?" she repeated. "If ever a girl needed a friend, it's now. My father is an old man; he can do nothing; he has no spirit. But—I think I could love you, if you freed me from that wretch!"

I caught the odour of her hair, and gazed into her exquisite face till my head swam. My disgust, my anger was gone. I am afraid to think what madness I might have said or done in another moment, but before the mo-

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ment passed, a shrill voice squeaked from the doorway.

"Do I interrupt you, my dears?" it said.

The *señorita* wheeled like a panther. In the entrance, dusty, dishevelled, but still wearing my hat and smiling coolly, stood the red-haired man I had met on the road to Vermilion.

CHAPTER IV

THE ICEBERG

"Go on talking. Don't mind me," he continued, calmly. "I'll just have a drink, if you please." And he poured himself a brimming bumper from a decanter on the table--which had been placed there for my use--and swallowed it with every appearance of enjoyment.

"What did you come back for?" blazed the girl, after a gasp.

"To see Crawford. I wanted to get some money," replied Dolan, easily.

"You lie!" I found my voice to say. "You came back because you thought that I'd be lynched by this time instead of you, and the coast would be clear for you, you murderer. If I only had a gun——"

"Hello," he interrupted. "I didn't know you at first, with your face so charmingly decorated with sticking-plaster and all. But it's

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my twin brother. Did you get your five dollars all right?"

His assurance was so extreme that I could only glare speechlessly.

"Wouldn't you have done the same in my place?" he went on. "I was in a tight fix, and you don't seem to have lost by it. You seem to have fallen on your feet."

He looked at Miss Ines and spoke lightly, but there was grimness in his eye.

"But how did you get into the house? It's surrounded," she said.

"Not at the back. I came through the stables and the yard. Let's have a look out."

He snapped off the light and peered out the window as I had done. After a moment he cautiously raised the sash and thrust out his head. The shutter had swung open, and the roar of the mob came into the room like a tempest. Then, startlingly, there was a click, and the room was flooded with light, leaving Dolan in full relief as he leaned out. A howl of recognition rose from the mob, and a rapid crackle-crackle of many revolvers. Dolan

whipped back with a cat-like leap and flashed to the other side of the room, where Miss Ranon stood with her hand still on the electric button. In a moment the room was dark again.

He shut the window, drew the curtains carefully, and once more switched on the electric light. Then he looked at the *señorita*, and she met his eye, pale but unflinching.

"You almost got me that time," he remarked grimly, and turned to me: "She's of the breed of the tiger. If you don't control her with your eye she'll have you by the throat."

"My hand was on the button. It was an accident, I swear——"

"I wouldn't swear," advised Dolan. "Look out!" as another bullet split through shutters and blinds, and brought down a cloud of plaster from the ceiling.

"We'd better go into another room," I suggested, and our queer trio went out, and down the hall to a smaller chamber, with no window on the street.

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"And now, how did you get here?" demanded Dolan, turning his attention to me again.

"Never mind that. The real question is, how are we going to get out," I answered. "That gang may break in at any moment, since they've seen you."

"Faith, you never said a truer word," said Dolan, slapping his great thigh. "I'd never have come back if I'd known the state of things. But we can get out the way I got in, and my opinion is that we'd better slip away as much like little mice as we can. Those fellows won't hurt our lady friend here."

"The sooner the better," I assented. At every moment I expected to hear the front door crash in.

Dolan sat in a brown study for a moment, looking thoughtfully at the *señorita* and then at me. Then, at a louder outburst from the street, he said briskly:

"Well, let's be going."

He led the way to the rear of the house, with which he seemed to be perfectly famil-

iar, and down the back stairs to the kitchen, where we found all the servants collected in total darkness and panic. The *señorita* followed us, and as Dolan opened the back door she drew me aside. I felt something cold and hard slipped into my hand. It was a revolver.

"Remember what I said," she breathed.

"Here, none of that!" cried Dolan, turning savagely. I slipped the revolver into my pocket just in time.

"A shot would bring the mob. They only want him," she whispered in my ear.

I hurried on, revolted. And yet, as I glanced back and saw her in the doorway, by the light of a match that Dolan struck, I caught a glimpse of her flushed, delicate face clear in the glow, and I thought that I should never see anything so beautiful and so terrible again. If she had called me back I would have stayed with her, I believe, but the match went out and the door closed behind us.

We crossed a brick-paved yard in the dark-

ness, and went into a great building that sounded with the stamping of horses, and that was full of the warm, ammoniacal odours of a stable. Dolan went on unhesitatingly, then paused, fumbled a moment, and a small door opened. Outside there was a lane, lighted by a street arc lamp fifty yards away, and there was no one in sight. We went down this lane for a few yards and then scaled a fence, and found ourselves in the darkness of a vacant lot. After crossing this, we came out upon a quiet back street, ill-lighted and very little built upon. The noise of the mob sounded faint and far behind.

"We're fairly safe now, unless somebody spots us accidentally," Dolan broke silence for the first time. "Where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere out of Vermilion," I said. "Where's the railway station?"

"Three blocks straight ahead. You'll not come back any more."

"I don't know. I'm prospecting in the hills near here——"

"You've heard more than was good for you here. I don't know how you got into that house, nor yet what the young lady was telling you, but I'll tell you one thing more. I'm a hard man to go up against."

"Oh, the young lady told me that," I remarked.

"Freeze to it, then, and don't meddle where you've no business. You'll not come back to Vermilion any more. The station's yonder where you see the red lights. Good-bye."

My hand was on the *señorita's* pistol, and I could have shot him as he moved away without looking back. No doubt the man richly deserved it, but I felt no call to be his executioner, and in fact at that moment I clung to Dolan as my only guide in that hostile city. I was weak and sore and stiff, and I felt terribly alone. The red and green glow of the distant switch lamps looked like warning signals to me, and I was mortally afraid to approach them. I might be recognised again—or rather, I might be again mistaken.

While I hung in an agony of fear and doubt, a sound cut short my perplexity. A far away railway whistle split the night—the sonorous, deep-toned blast of a passenger engine. That train would take me out of danger. I had no idea where it was going, but I wanted it, and I hobbled as fast as I could toward the station.

The train was coming in rapidly, and it rolled clanging into the station yards before I reached the place. There was a moment of bustle. I crossed the tracks, ran past the hissing locomotive, and I heard a voice cry:

“Garfield, Spokane, Seattle! All aboard!”

There was no time to take a ticket. As the train pulled out past me I jumped for the steps of the smoker and scrambled aboard just as the vestibule was about to be closed. The brakeman stared insolently at me as I passed him, and I realised for the first time that my clothes were torn into rags. But I did not care. The lights of Vermilion were dropping behind me, and I was safe.

Then a recollection of my destitute condition reminded me that I could not go far, af-

ter all. Besides, I would have to return for my hidden prospecting outfit, though the mining outlook was a gloomy one. My money was almost gone; I had no burro, and I could not buy another. Failure seemed certain, and I felt as sick and sore mentally as I did physically.

Then I recollected that Crawford at the mine office had snatched up a hundred dollars and thrust it into my pocket. Was it still there? It was not likely to be, after the *mêlée* I had been through, but I rummaged anxiously. At last, in the inside pocket of my coat, I touched a package that had the greasy feel of bank notes. Somebody—no doubt Miss Ranon—must have transferred it to that safer place while I lay senseless.

I pulled it out. To my amazement, it was a package of twenty twenty-dollar bills. Crawford or the cashier in his hurry must have picked up a bundle of twenties instead of fives.

I stared at this unexpected treasure-trove, almost trembling. Would I give it back?

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Never! For here was capital enough to carry out my first plan of going to the Alaska mines, with at least a fighting chance of success. The thought of Jessie came back to me like a pure breath through the murderous intrigues that had surrounded me, and I thanked heaven that I had been saved from treachery to her, and swore that I would come back with the money that Phil needed, or come back on ice.

After all the package of twenty-dollar bills would probably be charged to Dolan's account, and I felt that the Irishman owed me at least that indemnity. So I peeled off one of the bills and paid my fare to Seattle. I longed for a sleeping-car berth but dared not ask for it in my tattered and disreputable condition, so I coiled myself on the seat and sank into a deep stupor of exhaustion. I knew nothing more of the journey, and when I awoke the sun was on my head, and we were rattling through the yards of Seattle.

I scarcely breakfasted, so impatient was I to be about my embarkation for the north. I

soon saw that there would be no difficulty about getting transportation of any kind, for half the windows and walls along the water front were posted with advertisements of steamers for the gold-fields.

I chose the one that sailed soonest, and paid sixty dollars for a passage on the *Bolivia* to Juneau. Then I set to work to outfit myself as cheaply as I dared, and when it was over I had a great heap of kit and provisions, and about two hundred dollars left. This amount would take me from Juneau to Dawson, and would leave me with—I scarcely dared to estimate how much—to last me while I fought for Phil's honour, for Jessie's happiness, and for my

The *Bolivia* was one of that heterogeneous fleet that had been hastily mustered from all the seas of the world to supply the sudden demand for Alaska transportation. She had a history, I was told; she had been a smuggler, a filibuster, a South Sea trader. Once she had been a smart steamer of some twelve hundred tons; now she was a marine vagabond, rusty,

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ill-painted, insufficiently engined, but good enough to carry the gold-seekers, who would have embarked on a raft if it had offered them passage cheaply.

We had not many gold-seekers on our passenger list that voyage, as it happened, however. There were only half a dozen miners, a couple of government officials, two gamblers, and that was all. There were also six or eight dogs, and, I suppose, a crew of ten or fifteen men.

We sailed from Seattle early in the morning, in a dead calm, but off Vancouver Island the wind came up, blowing fresh from the east. It grew stronger as the mountains disappeared behind us, and, being the possessor of a sensitive stomach, I began to be uneasy. The sun went down cloudy, with scarcely a tinge of colour in the west, and it turned cold. The sea grew rougher, and I looked eagerly for the time when we would turn up the inside channel, and gain the shelter of the islands. But during the night I was awakened by deathly sickness, and found the

steamer rolling fearfully. A heavy sea was running, and at every plunge I could hear the crash of water on the decks overhead. For the rest of that night I suffered all the horrors of the worst sort of sea-sickness, which never elicits any sympathy from anybody; but in the morning I dragged myself on deck, in the hope that the fresh air would relieve me.

A furious gale was blowing from the east. The sky was grey as lead, and so was the sea through which the *Bolivia* laboured painfully. Her decks were streaming, and at intervals of about a minute she took a flood of water aboard that rushed foaming to and fro before it finally poured through the rail again. The land to the eastward had disappeared, and I was told that we were being blown considerably out of our course.

By noon the gale had increased to such an extent that the passengers were ordered to stay below to avoid the danger of being swept overboard. To me this did not matter much. Nothing mattered, in fact. I lay wretchedly

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in my bunk, and when I heard that we had failed to make the shelter of the islands, that we were travelling more west than north, and that our engines were quite unable to make headway against the gale, the news left me quite unmoved. I would have been relieved if I had heard that we were going ashore on the coast of Japan, and in some of my spasms I think that I would have given all the gold in Alaska, and Pill's liberty into the bargain, for a few yards of blessed, dry, motionless earth.

That night was a continuous nightmare. The *Bolivia* reeled and plunged, groaning, creaking and banging as if she were going to pieces. The dawn brought no change, and found the gale unabated. We were now far out on the Pacific. I was no sicker. I had reached the maximum possible. But during the afternoon the wind slackened somewhat, and the steamer was headed more to the north again. With the seas brought thus abeam, her rolling increased, and almost everybody aboard was sick. As for myself, I felt that I

could live no longer, and I really hoped that I was dying.

I think it was some hours after midnight when I was aroused from my lethargy of wretchedness by a sudden, heavy jar, and then a terrible crash that seemed to shatter all our framework. I was hurled out of my berth upon the floor, and I felt something grinding hard under the ship's bottom. But I lay where I fell, too sick to move or care. There was a crashing at her bows. I heard the dash of surf, and I knew that we must have run ashore.

On deck there was a great trampling, a wild shouting, and then a couple of pistol-shots were fired. Everybody had run up, and I was alone in the cabin. A terrible howling arose from the wretched dogs tied amidships.

I was almost too ill to move, but finally the fear of death overcame my nausea, and I crawled up to the deck.

An icy chill struck me with the open air, and a queer, cold odour was blown in my face. All our lights were out, and over our

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bow loomed a vast, towering bulk that glimmered white through the darkness. It seemed to extend indefinitely on either side, and the sea burst upon it in mighty breakers.

Spray was flying over our decks too, in a drenching torrent, and the steam was blowing off deafeningly. I thought I saw a group of my shipmates forward, and hurried to the bows, but there was no one there. The *Bolivian* was jammed against the white coast with her bows raised high as if she rested on some reef under the water. She heaved on the swell, and at every heave there was a terrible rending sound deep down in her centre.

But this was not the land. The pale glimmer of the cliffs, the cold, the smell of frost brought it home to me that we had split upon an iceberg.

Near the stern a lantern suddenly gleamed, and there I dimly saw a huddled crowd of struggling men. They were trying to lower a boat, and there was a furious scramble to get aboard. I heard some one bellowing

threats, orders, and then came the red flash of a revolver again.

My sea-sickness saved my life just then, for I was too weak to fall into a panic. I realised that I should have no chance in that insane crowd, and I stayed where I was, at the bows.

In another moment the boat went overboard, clumsily slipped too soon, and there was a terrible shriek which was instantly silenced by the sea, from the wretches who were in it.

The mob surged to another boat, and the frenzied struggle began over again. Shot after shot was fired; I saw dark forms on the deck, trampled as the fight swayed over them. And all the while I felt that terrible rending and giving at the heart of the steamer's frame, though I did not know what it portended.

But before the second boat could be lowered there was a splitting crash, and a great gap opened suddenly midway across the deck. Then I knew what was going to happen, and I yelled my warning.

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It was too late. Half the crowd started toward me, but the gap had already spread too wide to be leaped. The ship seemed to gape open like a mouth. A terrible hissing arose below, and an immense volume of hot steam spouted up, enshrouding the whole scene. I felt the steel fabric tremble under my feet, and the rending noise grew louder, ending with a great splitting crash. A smooth wave ran suddenly up the deck and wet me to the waist, and when the steam blew aside the whole after part of the ship was gone. She had broken in two and sunk, and the rest of her men with her.

This catastrophe smote me with horror, for I thought that the forward half was about to follow. The prow of the ship was scarcely twenty feet from where the ice rose high and sloping. An athlete could have jumped the gap.

I was no athlete, but I fixed a life-belt round my waist, and jumped. I fell short; I went under a smother of icy foam. The surf wrenched at me, but I struggled desper-

ately, till my feet touched something solid and slippery.

I tried to stand, fell, and a breaker lifted me, banged me violently against the ice, and left me panting at the edge of the surf line. From there I crawled, scrambling and slipping, to a place of greater safety.

Here I lay flat, my sea-sickness gone, but weak, wet and chilled to the bone, the rugged ice under me and nothing visible around me but the white, tumultuous crests of the rushing surf.

CHAPTER V

THE TREASURE OF THE BERG

I CROUCHED there for some time, shivering and miserable. Then it occurred to me that some of my shipmates might also have gained the berg, and, though I had little hope of it, I climbed higher for a better view. I found the ice much encrusted with sand and gravel, giving a good foothold; but when I was ten or twelve feet above the sea I could see nothing living, either in the water or on the ice.

But it was too dark to see anything clearly, and the noise of the wind and waves would have drowned any shout. I climbed a little higher; to the right the berg seemed to tower up to a great height, but I did not endeavour to scale it. It was useless to make any further explorations that night.

The bows of the steamer were still clinging to the ice, much to my surprise. I guessed, then, that she must have run half her length

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upon a shelf of the ice which projected under water. This held the bows still fast, while the unsupported stern had broken away under the battering of the surf.

Though I was drenched and chilled I actually felt better than at any time since the storm began. The berg scarcely seemed to heave at all; it was like the solid earth, and my stomach recovered itself. I even began to feel hungry. I had not eaten for two days, and a great longing for hot coffee filled me.

I could see little of the extent of the floating island, and after feeling my way about for a time I crept into a nook somewhat sheltered from the wind, and thought I would spend the rest of the night there.

I was in no very cheerful mood. Here was the end of another plan, another failure just when success was promised, and this time my life was likely to end with my enterprise. The luck had been steadily against me, I reflected bitterly. Then my mind wandered back to Pill and to Jessie, as to dwellers in some remote world of peace and comfort, and I fell

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into a sort of light-headed stupor, and dreamed fitfully of Goldendale, of the *Bonanza* office, and of the bee-hives in the sunny orchard.

Finally I realised that a grey light was spreading over the sea. I crawled out of my crevice. The wreck of the *Bolivia* still stood black against the ice in the dawn, and the sky was growing blue overhead.

The wind had gone down, and it was not so cold. Behind me, the ice rose thirty or forty feet in a glistening, sand-trusted parapet, broken into great cracks and fissures. From that height I should be able to see, and I began to scramble up, slipping and sprawling breathless with anxiety to reach the top.

As I drew myself upon the summit I cast a glance of desperate hope around, and my heart went down like lead. There was no one on the wreck. Nothing moved upon the berg. There was no boat, no sail, no smoke, no life anywhere upon the sea.

From where I stood I could survey the whole surface of my iceberg—the first one I

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had ever seen. It appeared to me to be more than two hundred yards in diameter, and was irregularly three-sided. In most places the ice went down sheer for fifteen or twenty feet to the water, but where the steamer had struck, the shore sloped gently, evidently continuing its slope under the surface. On this submerged reef of ice the forward half of the *Bolivia* still stuck fast, with her bottom probably ripped open. But if she had collided with the berg at almost any other point she would have stove in her bows, and gone down like lead. The luck had not been so wholly against me, after all, though my poor shipmates had not been equally favoured.

The surface of the berg was very irregular, rising in sudden pinnacles and ridges, and cut up with great cracks. From the higher parts flowed innumerable rivulets, cascading down to the sea. The berg was melting away, but that did not trouble me just then. The whole floating island shone with a green glitter, with the pale-green shimmer of glass, almost blinding when the sun rose. It would have



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been even more dazzling had not the ice been full of sand, gravel and rocks. This last particular surprised me, until I hit upon the explanation. No doubt, like most icebergs, this one had formed part of a great glacier in the arctic north, and after crawling down some slope with inconceivable slowness had found itself at last in the sea, and had broken off and floated southward. All this débris was the accumulation of its growth and travels ashore.

Here, at any rate, was my kingdom, more desolate than any desert island, destitute even of earth, except for the scattered gravel. It was a mere lump of congealed water, the very type of instability, floating awhile upon its sister element till it should be again dissolved.

For comfort my eyes continually returned to the fragment of the *Bolivia*. Shattered as it was, it was still something familiar, the work of man, and holding something of the warmth of humanity about it still. And then it occurred to me that if I could get aboard again I might find something to eat.

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This brought another reflection. The steamer, or what was left of her, was my only source of supplies. I might have to stay on the iceberg for days, possibly even for weeks, before a ship sighted me, and I ought to get what provisions I could from the wreck, for the bow might follow the stern at any minute.

I cast one more glance over the empty sea where the white-caps still ran high, and went down to the sloping shore again. It did not look as if it would be very difficult to get aboard the wreck, for the foremast had fallen over the bows during the night, and a great mass of tangled wire rigging swung in the wash of the waves. By wading out a few steps I could grasp it.

The water felt warmer than the air, but the surprising force of the first breaker took me off my feet, dashed me against the ice, and swept me back again to the sea. As I struggled in the foam, trying to touch bottom, my hand encountered a steel rope. I clutched it, hauled myself up, and with an energetic scramble was aboard the wreck.

The *Bolivia* was a pitiable sight. Fifty feet of her forward portion was all that was left of her, and the ocean ran crashing into her gaping hull. At every shock of a wave there was a yielding quiver through her shattered frame that warned me to make haste with my work of salvage.

There was practically nothing on the deck; everything movable seemed to have gone overboard. The cabin stairs, and the cabins themselves, seemed to have gone with the stern, and to go below I had to creep through the forecastle hatchway and down the iron ladder to the crew's quarters forward.

This I ventured to do, though with much fear that the wreck might go to pieces while I was below.

From the bottom of the ladder I could see daylight and water, looking aft through the ship's broken end. It was easy to see that the engines had gone, and, in fact, all the heavy machinery seemed to have slid out through the wide opening, carrying most of the bulkheads with them.

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I knew nothing of the geography of this part of the ship, but presently I found myself in a dismal dungeon fitted with bunks, which must have been the sleeping-quarters of the crew. Here were blankets which would be useful, but for the present it was food which I most desired.

In one of the bunks, however, I found a flask of whiskey only half emptied, and I drank three or four great gulps as a precaution against the cold and wet. From my totally empty stomach the liquor rose instantly to my head, and filled me with a warm cheerfulness, almost with gaiety. I began to feel certain of rescue, and my shipwreck seemed merely a romantic episode. I chuckled to myself as I rummaged about tipsily, and I whooped with delight when I came upon the cook's store-room.

Here was food indeed—fresh and salt and tinned meats, potatoes, beans, biscuits, butter, bread—most of it quite uninjured. There was no great quantity of anything; probably the bulk of the stores were kept elsewhere, but

there was enough to last me a long time, and I began to eat corned beef and bread with the appetite of a shipwrecked man who has not tasted food for fifty hours.

When I had finished eating I began to carry up my spoil by armfuls to the deck. I had accumulated a great heap there before I considered how I was to land it. As for the small articles, such as the tins of meat, there was no difficulty; I could simply toss them ashore. The larger packages were another thing, but finally I made a large bundle with a couple of blankets, tied it to a long rope and jumped recklessly overboard with the other end of the line.

I came very near drowning before I hauled my bundle ashore through the surf. It was clear that I would have to devise some less hazardous way of landing my cargo, and a less destructive one, for of course the bundle was wet as a sponge.

The distance was not great, but the problem was difficult. Finally, after several wet and dangerous crossings and a tedious amount

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of toil, I rigged an inclined wire rope from the ship's rail to an iron bar fixed firmly in a crevice of the ice. I could tie my parcels of supplies to this line and send them sliding down to the ice by their own weight.

This contrivance worked very well. I landed seven of the men's blankets, fully fifty pounds of salt and tinned meat, several boxes of biscuits, at least a bushel of potatoes, and a couple of pounds of cocoa—all I could find of it.

But what pleased me most was the discovery of two large lamps and a five-gallon tin of coal oil, almost full. There was no fuel on the berg, but I knew that I could cook in some fashion with these lamps.

As cooking utensils I selected a coffee-pot, a sauce-pan, a frying-pan, and a couple of basins. I could find neither knives nor spoons, but I took an axe and a shovel, with which I thought that I might hollow out a sort of shelter cave in the ice.

Then, as my stuff was accumulating at the

other end of the line I went ashore to carry it up the beach.

It was most providential that I did so. I had carried most of it into safety, and was busy with armfuls of miscellaneous goods, when I became aware of a strange splitting sound under the sea. For a moment I thought the berg was breaking up.

The whole island vibrated and seemed to heel slightly. My wire carrier-rope suddenly tightened and jerked the iron bar from its socket. The water boiled up round the *Bolivia's* bows, and she went out of sight like a stone in the sea. A great smooth wave washed up on the ice from the eddy of her sinking.

At this catastrophe I stood appalled. The ice under her bows must have broken and allowed her to sink. And I had saved not half the stores I had hoped to land.

But it was not so much the material loss that overwhelmed me. The disappearance of the last of the ship seemed to double my loneliness in an instant, to intensify my desolation.

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The last link with humanity was gone, and I was alone with the pitiless northern sea and the island of ice.

That was the most poignantly bitter moment of my shipwreck. I sat down on the ice, feeling unable to cope with the situation, to wrestle with destiny any longer.

My clothes were sodden on me. I was cold and stiff, and I still ached in every limb from the hard knocks I had received in Vermilion.

The sun shone bright on the seamed ice; the weather had turned fine—too late. The water ran down the berg in streams, and it came upon me suddenly that the berg was melting fast.

The farther south it drifted the faster it would melt, so that it could be my refuge for only a very limited time. Up to that moment I had not fully realised the gravity nor the imminence of this danger.

I would have to be rescued before the berg reached warmer waters. I was out of the track of regular navigation, and, to add to

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my despair, I remembered that ships approach icebergs only by mischance. When ice is sighted on the horizon it is usually given a wide berth, and I had no means of making signals. What chance would I have, then, of being taken off, even if a ship should come in sight in these unfrequented waters?

I crouched there desolately enough, full of these gloomy reflections, absent-mindedly picking lumps of gravel out of the ice and flinging them about. I had been doing this for some time when I happened to notice that the pebble in my hand had not the feeling of stone.

I glanced at it with a sort of mechanical curiosity. It had a dull yellow surface.

The thought of what it might be shocked me out of my apathy. I pulled out my knife and drew the point across it. The scratch left a shining yellow line. The stuff was soft. It was not a pebble. It was a golden nugget!

CHAPTER VI

THE FORTUNE

I DROPPED on my hands and knees instantly to see if there were any more of these nuggets. For one wild instant I fancied that all this gravel was not gravel, but lumps of gold.

But I could not see any more golden nuggets; there was sand and bits of rock and nothing else embedded in the green ice. Then I remembered that for ten minutes I had been rolling pebbles down the slope into the sea, and it seemed to me now that some of them had had the weight of metal. I raged at the thought that I might have flung away a fortune.

I went down to the water's edge to see if some of them might have stopped before rolling into the sea. Half-way I came upon another bed of gravel which I had trampled over twenty times, and I stooped to examine it, stirring it up with my knife-blade. Al-

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most immediately I turned up a flattened, irregular lump of gold the size of a large pea.

At this discovery I uttered an excited yell, and began to claw into the half-thawed gravel, scrutinising every lump. I found two more nuggets in the next couple of minutes, and then a third, the last not much larger than a pin-head.

When with all my searching I could find no more nuggets I cast about for some means of washing the gravel. The only substitute for a gold-pan that I had was one of the small basins, but I filled it with water from one of the streamlets and dropped in a large handful of gravel.

Little by little I flung out the sand, the coarse gravel and the discoloured water, as I tilted the basin with a swirling motion. The heavier substances would be left at the bottom, and, too impatient to finish the job neatly, I threw out the rest of the gravel and peered into the pan.

There at the bottom, among the little stones, shone the yellow specks I had hoped for.

Some of it was really gold-dust, some was in thin flakes, and there were half a dozen particles large enough to pick up with the fingernails. I carefully cleaned the precious metal out of the rubbish. There was gold enough to cover a silver quarter.

There is something about the sight of virgin gold in quantity that goes to the head. I lost sight of the sea, of the ice, forgot that I was a castaway, forgot everything but the auriferous gravel and those yellow specks.

I washed and washed, hurrying to and fro for pans of fresh water, burning with all a gambler's excitement when I gazed into the bottom of the pan; and when I had cleared out my little heap of metal I put it into a meat-tin which I hastily washed for that purpose. This I carefully covered with a blanket, that the wind might not scatter the precious dust.

There were only a few bucketfuls of gravel in the bed, and presently I had cleaned up the last of it. I sat up as if awaking from a dream.

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My back ached violently; I was splashed from head to foot with mud and wet sand. But what had I got?

I scarcely knew. I uncovered the meat-tin. There was fully a pound of clean gold, in dust, nuggets and flakes. My work had been worth nearly two hundred and fifty dollars.

I stood up and looked around me. Here, there and everywhere were beds of gravel of the same appearance as the one I had washed. They had accumulated as the ice melted around them, and the ice under them was full of the same valuable rubbish. After I had cleaned up all the surface gravel, I could dig the rest out of the ice.

But where had it come from, all this gold adrift in the Pacific? Clearly this gravel must be from the shores where the parent glacier had formed. It was from the north; it must have drifted from Alaska or Siberia, bringing with it the rubbish, the rock, the gold dust that it had scraped up, from the land-slides that had fallen upon it, from all the earth that had frozen into it ashore.

I had failed to reach the Klondike, but the Klondike had come to me. In fact, this was much better than any diggin's ashore. I had a larger area to work than an ordinary claim. There was plenty of water, and there was not the slightest danger of my claim being jumped or my gold being stolen. I could work my mine at my leisure, secure from observation or interference as probably no miner ever was before.

And I fancied that the long alternate thawing and freezing of the glacier had in a manner sifted the gravel for me, had performed a sort of preliminary washing, which accounted for the concentration of so much gold in a small area.

Here at last was the fortune I had hoped for. My future with Jessie showed rose-colour—that is, if I could only get safely ashore with my plunder. But I did not worry myself about that slight difficulty. I was sure to be picked up, I thought—so much had my point of view changed in the last hour—and there was plenty of time to think about it.

But then a sudden dread assailed me that the rest of the gravel might not be gold-bearing.

I hurried about from place to place, washing a panful of sand at each bed, finding colour almost everywhere. Only two or three spots showed no trace of metal, but in recompense I came upon a pocket of nuggets sun-sunken in the ice, where I gathered up several ounces of pure gold, one of the nuggets being almost as large as the end of my thumb. I was reassured. There was plenty of gold. I had only to gather it up.

My basin was so small as to be of little use as a gold-pan, compelling me to handle the gravel in such small quantities as to delay me greatly. But I had taken out three or four hundred dollars already, and I estimated that it would run nearly fifty dollars to the full-sized pan. On some of the rich creeks of the Yukon I knew that it sometimes ran much higher for short periods, but I was satisfied with my own showing. For I estimated that there was gravel enough in sight to make thousands of panfuls—perhaps ten thousand,

perhaps twenty—and there was as much more buried in the ice. Half a million dollars, or even more, was hardly an extravagant estimate of what I might win if I could thoroughly clear the berg of its treasure.

I was so hypnotised by all this prospective wealth that I quite lost sight of my perilous position. From time to time I glanced up and saw the vast empty sea around me, with a shock of surprise, and straightway forgot it again. I was no longer afraid of death; I had been poor so long that riches seemed to me a talisman against every sort of danger.

It was now growing near midday, as I judged by the sun, and I realised that I was hungry, indeed almost famished. There was plenty of time for mining, and I controlled my impatience. I filled my lamps with oil, and, getting them into the most sheltered spot I could find, I lighted them and undertook to boil some water to make cocoa.

It was not a success. The lamps flared and smoked in the currents of air, and I saw that

I would have to hollow out a cavern in the ice for my kitchen. I had no inclination for such a task just then, however; my mind was too full of the treasure; and I drank the lukewarm cocoa and water, ate biscuits and meat, and gazed about at the heaps of gravel that held my fortune.

After my lunch I set to work again, more slowly this time, more deliberately, tasting my good fortune to the full. I was continually irritated by the small size of my pan, but I glowed with delight whenever after washing each basinful, I added a little yellow dust to the growing heap in the corned-beef tin.

But this afternoon the results were much more irregular than in the morning. Sometimes a pan would fail to show a trace of colour, sometimes I got a large spoonful, but I found no more nuggets for some time.

To bring the water nearer I cut a little conduit leading from one of the rivulets to the place where I was at work. The water was icy cold, of course; my hands were speedily numbed, and my nails grew blue, but I was

far too deeply absorbed to be conscious of any such minor discomforts.

Little by little my pile of dust increased, in spite of the inadequacy of my tools. My wet clothing dried on me as I worked in the sun and wind all that afternoon. I was dead tired when night fell, and cramped and stiff, and my Vermilion bruises ached atrociously.

I scarcely dared to guess how much I had cleaned up, but on getting out my tin and balancing it carefully, I calculated that I had over two pounds of the yellow stuff, and it was worth at least two hundred dollars.

If I had had a larger pan I might have taken four times as much with no more labour, but as yet I had scarcely scratched the resources of the iceberg. If all went well, what might I not expect to realise?

But what I needed now was hot food and plenty of it, unless I wanted to be paralysed with cramps and rheumatism the next day. I was too tired to dig out a shelter, so I hung blankets from the piles of ice so as to make a cosy nook for my lamps, and I managed to

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boil a kind of rich soup, composed of water, cocoa, bits of meat and biscuits.

This warmed me through and through, and when I had finished it I spread a couple of oilskin coats on the ice, rolled all my blankets around me, and lay down on the berg, almost happy. I would not have chosen to be anywhere else in the world that night.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT THE ICE HELD

I AWOKE several times during the night, and saw the pale moon shining on the ice, and heard the incessant rushing noise of the sea. Occasionally a dash of spray spattered my blankets, and through all the thickness of the woollens I could feel the chill of the berg.

But toward morning I slept more soundly, and awoke at last to find it fully light, and with my heart full of a strange excitement that at first I did not understand. Then I remembered, and, struck with the fear that it might have been a dream, I jumped up to verify my recollection. Yes, the gold was there—the rich yellow flakes almost filling the can. My fortune was a reality.

I was impatient to set to work again at the gravel, but I realised that my first care should be to prepare some sort of shelter against any

more such nights of exposure as the last two. For it was cold, in spite of the clear sunlight, and a northwest wind blew freely, adding to the chill under foot.

After a cold breakfast, therefore, I set to work with one of the axes to hew out a cavern in the side of the ice mountain where it rose steepest. It was irritating work, for the ice split in all sorts of unexpected directions; the axe glanced, and the ice splinters flew into my face. It took me two or three hours to hollow out a kind of tomb-like recess, long enough to lie down in, and high enough for sitting, but not for standing. It was shelter, however, and I found that my lamps burned well there.

I hung up a couple of blankets to mask the bare ice, covered the floor with the driest gravel I could find, and that again with sand, and I was tickled with the idea that even my bed was of gold. Princes lodged less magnificently.

When I had finished my house I went back eagerly to my labour of love—the most fascin-

ating of amusements, the accumulation of visible wealth. At first I was haunted by a continual fear that I had come to the end of my lead, and I looked into the bottom of each basin of gravel with eagerness and dread. Temporary failures made my heart sink, but the second or third painful always reassured me; and at last I came to have sufficient confidence in my mine to work steadily on with the certainty of reward.

When I left off that evening I estimated that my day's work had been worth about three hundred dollars. I had worked less continuously than on the day before, and I had found fewer nuggets. I was well pleased none the less, and I hung up a blanket at the door of my cave to keep the wind out, and slept warmly, and, for a castaway, with extraordinary peace.

Thus began my singular life on the iceberg, a life which was to last for less than a week. Almost from dawn to dark I worked at my mine, gathering up the precious dust in specks, in pinches, in handfuls, filling the tin boxes

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one after another. It was only now and again that I found any nuggets of considerable size; most of the gold was in flaky dust, almost like bits of gold leaf. I soon saw that it would take me longer than I had calculated to work over the whole berg. I had scarcely touched an appreciable part of the surface gravel, and I had not attempted to dig into the ice.

All day long I worked, eating cold food for the most part, for my lamps proved a slow and inefficient means of cooking, after all. dark I went to bed in my icy cell, and awoke daily in a moist warmth, with the blankets damp under me, and the ceiling dripping overhead. But I had neither colds nor rheumatism. My wounds and bruises healed in a surprisingly short time, and I felt remarkably well during my whole stay on the berg. There was vigour in the fresh, healthy smell of the ice and the salt breath of the sea.

During the first five days I estimated that I gathered almost two thousand dollars' worth of gold, in spite of my too small gold-pan. At that rate I should clear over ten thousand dol-

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lars if I could stay on the berg for a month—enough to clear Pill of his perplexities, but not much more. No such results would satisfy me, and I fancied that I might hail some passing ship and send Pill seven thousand dollars, with instructions to send a schooner to my relief, while I stayed on the floating island and gathered more money. I even dreamed of hiring a steamer to tow the whole berg ashore where we could work it at our leisure, untroubled by the fear of its melting.

For there was no doubt that it was melting to the sea, discoloured and muddy when they ran through the gravel beds. It was maddening to think how much gold they were daily carrying into the Pacific. Of course I could not discern any actual diminution in the size of the berg. It was not melting fast enough for that, but it seemed to me that every day its jagged outlines grew rounder.

My first fears revived, and more acutely, but now I was not so much concerned about my own safety as about this incessant drain, this literal leak in my property. I felt sure

that I would be taken off before the lump of ice became too small to float me, but the gold was escaping faster than I could gather it.

How fast we were drifting southward I could not even guess, though I tried hard to remember what I had read of ocean currents and their speed. I did not even know in what latitude I was, but I thought that every day the sun shone warmer, and the streams gushed down faster to the sea. At that time I did not know, or I had forgotten, that the greatest melting of an iceberg takes place under the water.

However, I redoubled my exertions to save what I could while the ice held together. I rose early and I worked late, so late that I could scarcely distinguish the gold dust from the sand. The days seemed to go by like lightning. They were too short for the work I had in hand, and at night I slept the heavy slumber of total weariness, awaking at dawn almost too impatient to be at work, to prepare my breakfast.

I fancy that I was scarcely sane during

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those days. Solitude, danger and the intoxication of sudden wealth combined to produce a state of feverish excitement in which I could think of only one thing. I was at ease only when I had the gold-pan in my hand and was adding to my hoard, which it was far from certain that I should ever live to use.

They were vivid, those days on the berg; and now with the slightest effort of memory I can see the sun glaring on the ice, I can feel the cold, damp atmosphere, and I can hear the monotonous rush and crash of the sea against the melting ledges, and the incessant musical fall of the streams that were carrying away my fortune.

But not all of it. I had worked too hard for that, and I had close upon ten pounds of dust and nuggets in a row of corned-beef tins. If I had had a proper gold-pan I might have had three times as much.

There was the more reason for haste, and there was plenty of gold left—perhaps ten times what I had taken out, perhaps a hundred times. And from that time I worked

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almost without taking time to eat; and every night and morning my first and last glance was over the vast ocean, growing daily bluer and darker, and always empty of sail or smoke. But I no longer wished for a ship. I did not want to be rescued—not yet.

The sixth day proved disappointing and depressing. There was a driving fog on the sea, and a cold drizzle blew on the northwest wind. The berg was a wretched and cheerless place that day, and my mining turned out but poorly. For the first four hours I collected only three or four ounces, a most disappointing drop from my previous results. In the afternoon, however, I tried a bed of gravel near the top of the berg and on the other side. It was a new spot, and almost at once I opened a pocket, and took out a dozen nuggets of various sizes, and at least four ounces of coarse gold.

It was the best find I had made, and I at once undertook to dig out all the rest of the frozen gravel from that spot and to wash it thoroughly.

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The gravel-bed went deep, much deeper than I had expected, and at the expense of the edge of my axe I hewed a great hole and raised a large mound of ice-chips mixed with frozen sand. But the more there was of it the better I was pleased, and I continued to split out the gravelly ice, determined to go to the bottom of it. I had already picked out a few small nuggets that came in sight in the débris of ice and gravel as I worked.

I had dug a great pit, perhaps three or four feet deep and a couple of yards across when I noticed a kind of dark shadow under the opalescent ice at the bottom. I took this to be another layer of gravel, and cut into it hard with my axe. A great lump of ice flew up, and with it a shred of frozen fur.

At this I perceived that it must be the body of some animal, thus preserved in natural cold storage, and I cut out the ice a little more carefully. But in half a dozen strokes I came upon something that was unmistakable. It was a human hand.

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There it lay, brown, hairy, shrunken, but perfectly preserved, protruding from the ice, while the arm to which it was attached was still embedded. At the shock and horror of this discovery I dropped the axe, and retreated with prickly fright stirring at the roots of my hair.

But I recovered my nerve in a moment. The man was dead enough. Heaven only knew, indeed, how long he had lain embedded in the glacier. At first I resolved to cover him up again and let him rest in his icy sepulchre till the ice should melt, but when I looked upon the hand again I was seized with a great curiosity to see the rest of the body, to see what manner of man he had been, and I set to work to dig him up.

This would not have taken long, had it not been that I was obliged to cut out the ice very carefully for fear of mutilating the body. As it was, it must have been almost an hour before I had the thing cleared. It was shrouded in furs; the face was down and I could not see it, but I laid hold of the shoulders, though

with a terrible shrinking, and heaved the body out of the hole to the surface of the ice.

He was not an Indian, as I had expected, nor an Eskimo. It was the body of a white man with long brown hair, shaggy-bearded, too, dressed savagely enough in fur and buckskin. In his belt was a pistol with a flint lock, of such antiquated pattern that it was evident that almost a century must have passed since the ice had grown over his body.

There was no mark of injury on him, that I could see. I guessed that he had been frozen, or had starved to death, while crossing the glacier somewhere in the Alaskan hills. There was something in the cast of his features that led me to imagine that he had been a Russian, and indeed the Russians were almost the only whites to penetrate Alaska a century ago.

The sight of this antique corpse, rigid as granite, and perfectly preserved in its grave of ice, filled me with strange speculations, and as I gazed at it, it occurred to me that there might be something on it to show whence it

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came. It was difficult to open the mass of skins that swathed his body, half rotten, half frozen, and brittle with frost and age as they were, and I was obliged to wrench them roughly apart. Under them I found a wool-len jacket, but without pockets. My vague hope of finding something, papers or trinkets, was destroyed, and I stood looking at the stiff form for some minutes before I noticed a deer-skin pouch slung over the shoulder, and almost concealed by the muddle of clothing.

It was very heavy. I had a premonition of what it contained before I opened it. It was half full of coarse gold; there might have been ten ounces of the metal. The sack contained nothing else. Plainly this man had been the very first of the Alaskan gold-seekers, the true Klondike pioneer, and had frozen or starved in the path of the glacier, a century ago. Then, as now, men had died of the gold fever; there he had died and been buried, to come to light again so strangely in the middle of the Pacific, making me his heir.

So far as I could see, there was nothing else

on the body, and I shrank from further researches. I dropped the pouch of gold into my pocket, and began to wonder what I should do with its owner. I had no relish for him as a neighbour on the berg, now that I knew of his existence, and I finally decided to throw him into the sea.

I dragged him therefore to the edge of the berg where the ice went down sheer, and, as decently as I could, I dropped him overboard. The water splashed high around him, and he sank out of sight. I straightened up, glanced mechanically round the horizon, and the shock of what I saw drove the Russian a thousand miles out of my mind.

The fog had cleared to the south, and there lay a large ship, hove to and motionless, though a brisk wind blew. She was not a mile away, and I could see the movement of men on her decks.

The sight of this vessel filled me with the strangest mixture of emotions—a sharp, homesick desire for mankind again, and a great dread. I stared at the ship; I could not take

my eyes off her, till a boat suddenly appeared descending from her rail, and moved toward the berg.

They had seen me; they were coming to take me off, but I resolved that I would by no means consent to go. Once separated from my treasure I was sure that I should never be able to find it again, and I was prepared to take any risks for two weeks' more work on the gravel.

I dodged down from the top of the berg and bolted to my cave, where I crouched. I hoped that they would not find me there.

A long time seemed to pass, and then I heard a tremendous voice hailing the berg. This ceased when a dozen calls had gone unanswered, but presently I heard the crunch of boots on the gravel and ice.

"See where he's been diggin' holes," I heard some one say, only a few yards from me; and another voice replied, "Ay, as like as not, if he's been here long."

I cowered in silence, but in a couple of minutes the mouth of my cave was blocked

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by the bulk of a big man in rough sea garb, who stared in at me.

"Hullo, mate!" he said. "We've come to take you aboard. You're all right now."

"No, thanks. I prefer to stay here," I replied.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTAIN M'CRIMMON

THE sailor stared, and a couple of other seamen appeared at his shoulder, crowding up to look.

"Come," he said, taking my arm gently but forcibly. "That's the brig *Oregonian*, of Seattle, Captain McCrimmon, and I'm the second mate. My name's Conover. We're going to take you home. Don't you understand?"

"You're very kind, but I don't want to be taken home. I've plenty of food and water here. Let me alone. I'm all right."

"Mad as a March hare, poor devil!" the mate muttered, glancing back at his men. "One of you take him by the other arm," he added, and they tried to drag me out of my den.

There was a lively struggle for a few min-

utes. I fought every inch of the way, and when they had finally extracted me, we all three rolled in a clinch down the ice-slope, with the fourth sailor running helplessly behind. Good luck checked us before we rolled into the sea, and I was pinned down and obliged to surrender.

"But for Heaven's sake don't take me away!" I pleaded, as coolly as I could. "I've got good reasons, good reasons, for wanting to stay on this berg."

As I said it I realised that this must sound like the wildest insanity, and my appearance, ragged, unshaven, dirty, mud-splashed, was not calculated to inspire confidence in my judgment.

"Come along!" said the mate, without paying any attention to my prayer. "Hold on to him, you men. He's liable to break away and throw himself overboard."

I was dragged toward the boat, and then in the midst of my despair it flashed upon my mind that this ship would reach the American coast before many days, after all. With

my plunder I could instantly charter a fast schooner or small steamer, and get back to the berg in time to finish extracting its frozen treasure.

"Well, I'll go if I must," I said, "but really I'd rather stay here."

"You'll be much better where you're going," said Conover, soothingly.

"But anyhow you must let me take my kit along," I protested. "I've got some valuables up there in a hole in the ice."

"What have you got?" the mate inquired. "We've no time to waste."

"Blankets," I hesitated, "Meats, tools, lamps——"

"Oh, shucks!" my captor exclaimed, impatiently. "We've got all the blankets and lamps you'll want on board."

And they began to march me toward the boat again, which was lying close to the ice in charge of another seaman.

"But I've got more than that! I cried, in a panic. "I've got some money—I've got a watch! My God, man! it mayn't be much

but it's all I've got in the world! You wouldn't take that away from me, would you?"

"Have you really got something up there?" demanded the mate, hesitating.

"Everything I've got in the world is up there, I tell you," I said, trying to control my nerves to an appearance of sanity, though I was really almost mad with alarm.

"All right, I suppose you can get your stuff, then. One of you men go with him, and keep an eye on him. Be quick."

I rushed up to my cave, followed by the seaman. To my great relief, the man did not attempt to spy upon my doings inside the shelter, but remained at a little distance, while I hurriedly poured all my gold from the tins into the centre of a blanket, and knotted it tight. Slinging this over my shoulder, I emerged with a load considerably heavier than its size indicated.

"Didn't amount to much after all, your kit of valuables," remarked the mate, laying a firm hand on my elbow. He kept it there till

we got into the boat, where I sat facing him at the stern. The gold-sack lay between us, and the mate pushed it experimentally with his foot.

"Holy Moses, what have you got there? Old metal, or gravel?" he exclaimed.

"Old metal," said I, grimly and truthfully, confirming, I suppose, his poor opinion of my sanity. Then I broached the topic that was of most interest to me.

"How many days do you expect to be in making Seattle?" I asked, almost trembling.

"Why, we're not going to Seattle. We're bound the other way—for Hong-Kong," the mate replied, coolly.

I absolutely staggered at this shock. I lurched in my seat.

"But, great heavens! I can't go to Hong-Kong!" I stammered.

"I reckon you'll have to," replied the sailor, drily. "Better than going to the bottom, ain't it?"

At that, I really did become almost insane. I tried to fling myself overboard, that I might

swim back to the iceberg. I fought, bit, kicked and clawed in a perfect frenzy. I even tried to upset the boat. I cursed and pleaded and almost wept, but my ejaculations had no effect upon the men, who, I must admit, handled me with remarkable forbearance. They believed that shipwreck and hardship had turned my brain.

Finally I gave up—when I was down in the bottom of the boat with two pairs of knees on my body—and I resolved to reserve myself for a last desperate appeal to the captain himself. I had not long to wait, for almost immediately the boat came alongside the brig, and hooked on. I caught a glimpse of curious heads craned over the rail as we plunged up and down on the swell. I wondered how I was to get aboard, but this difficulty was quickly solved by a line being made fast round my waist, and I was swung into the air and landed on the deck like a sack of flour.

I found myself in the presence of a little grey-bearded man, who looked at me with sour interest. At a distance the crew clus-

tered to look at me. Even the cook had come out of his galley.

Conover came over the rail with agility at that moment.

"Only one man on the berg, captain," he said. "Seems to be plumb crazy—loneliness, I reckon. Didn't want to come with us. He's brought a sackful of gravel," pointing to my blanket, which fell with a tremendous thud on the deck at that moment.

"Who are ye?" demanded the skipper, with a pronounced Scotch burr. "Ye're na seaman?"

The skipper was short and lean, with a grey, goatlike beard, yellowed with tobacco-chewing. His face was the colour of bronze, and his little blue eyes were like the scales of a dead fish. There was something mean, surly and cruel in the very poise of his head. I had never met his type before, but instinct put me on my guard—though not sufficiently, after all.

"I'm not crazy at all, captain," I said, earnestly. "My name is Shields of California,

and I'm a shipwrecked miner. I should like to speak to you in private."

Captain McCrimmon gave me a sharp glance, hesitated, seemed to chew on it, and finally led the way below, without a word.

"Well, what have ye to say?" he demanded, when we were in his diminutive cabin, where there was just room for a couple of bunks, a table and a locker.

"You are bound for Hong-Kong?" I asked.

"I am."

"Well, it's a matter of the utmost importance to me to get back to San Francisco at once. I will give you a thousand dollars to turn back and put me ashore within five miles of any town on the Pacific coast."

"A thousand dollars! And how will ye pay me that rather lar-rge amount?" demanded the captain, ironically.

"In gold," I said.

He almost sneered at me. I had to take the risk. I knew it, but I hesitated. Finally,

however, I untied my blanket, and took out a handful of dust and small nuggets.

"I will pay you in gold," I repeated.

The captain picked up one of the nuggets, examined it carefully, and then lifted the blanket to try its weight.

"Man, ye maun have there twenty, twenty-five pounds o' gold!" he exclaimed, shocked out of his impassiveness.

"Not so much as that," I assured him. "Will you take my offer?"

"Let's hear how ye got it," he said, assuming his sullen and brooding expression again.

"It's Klondike gold," I said. "I've been mining and our steamer was wrecked on the iceberg you saw. I was the only man saved, and I managed to save my gold with me. That's the whole story, and now I'm in a desperate hurry to get home."

I was almost certain now that we could, with a little bargaining, come to terms.

"What was the name of your ship?" he asked.

"The *Mexico City*," I replied, inventing a name on the emergency.

"Never heard of her. No such ship reported missing." He gloomed at me again for a few moments, while my spirits gradually sank.

"I can't put back for ye," he said, emphatically. "Not if ye was to offer me ten thousand dollars. I'm bound to my owners. I would lose, d'ye see, eight days at the least, with the wind we have. I'll not do it!" he repeated, banging his fist passionately on the table, "and d'ye hear, I'll not have ye ask me again. The thing is not decent to ask a ship-master."

"Well, then," I said, "I'll give you a hundred dollars just to put me back on the iceberg, and I'll take my chance of being picked up by an east-bound ship."

"I can't do that, either. It would be murder. Ye maun be mad to ask it. There isna an east-bound ship passing this way once a fortnight, and no ship goes nearer a berg than she can help. No, ye maun just go on to

Hong-Kong wi' us, and ye can come back on a passenger liner. And, by the by, ye maun pay your cabin passage on this ship," he added. "Else ye'll be put with the crew and work your passage out."

"How much do you want?" I asked, trying to control my rage and disappointment.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars."

"I'll see you in Hades first!" I retorted.

"Verra weel, verra weel," said the skipper, craftily. "Out ye go to the focs'l, then."

I picked up my blanket in a blind fury, and started out.

"But ye'll leave your gold here. I'll put it in my locker and give ye a receipt for it. Man, ye wouldn't take all that money into the focs'l amongst the crew!"

The skipper sat down and hurriedly wrote a receipt for ten pounds of gold dust—which he immediately altered to five pounds—and blotted it and offered it to me.

"I don't want it," I said. "I'll take the stuff with me."

"Ye'll do as I bid ye!" he cried, with a

sudden snarl. "Ye'll leave your money in safety, and ye'll go into the focs'l, and ye'll bunk with the crew, and ye'll learn to hand reef and steer till we get to Hong-Kong, or else ye'll pay your proper passage money to do nothing. But ye'll learn that I'm the master of this ship, and I'm not to be bullied!"

What he said was true; I was obliged to recognise its force. The skipper was the absolute master on board. If I undertook the unaccustomed labour of working my passage as a sailor he might, he probably would, contrive to make life unbearable for me; and I felt a shrewd suspicion that I would never see my gold again if I left it in his hands, receipt or no receipt. For I had little faith in Captain McCrimmon.

I canvassed these probabilities quickly while the skipper glared at me.

"Well," I said, finally, "if you're determined to rob me, I suppose I'll have to submit. I'll pay for my passage to Hong-Kong; though I don't want to go there."

McCrimmon, without relaxing his grim

countenance, produced a set of coarse scales, and weighed out fourteen ounces of gold from my hoard. This he stowed carefully away in a locker.

"Now give me back my receipt," he said, cannily.

I restored the document, and he showed me to the berth I was to occupy, in another cabin containing four bunks. Two of these were already occupied by the first and second mates. The other two were vacant.

"You can stow your gold under your berth," he said. "Anything's safe in this end of the ship."

But I had my doubts of that, and as soon as he had gone I made up about half the gold into small packets and concealed them in my pockets and otherwise about my person. So much should be safe, at any rate, and I concealed the rest among the blankets, and went on deck.

The brig was under way again. My iceberg was already growing small on the sea, and I looked after it with unspeakable anx-

ietty and dread, for I wondered if I would ever set eyes on it again.

Could I have known the almost incredible circumstances under which I should see the green flash of its sides next, my fears might have been still greater.

CHAPTER IX

THE FLOATING HELL

MY impressions on that first day were confused enough. It was the first time I had been on board a large sailing-vessel at sea, and the heavy and fantastic machinery of the spars and rigging overhead, the motion of the vessel, so different from that of a steamer, the ceaseless manœuvres of the crew, and the surprising and apparently dangerous nearness of the water, struck me with a strangeness that mingled with my anxiety as to the future.

But I could not be long aboard the *Oregonian* without noticing the demeanour of the crew, and the relations prevailing between the two ends of the ship. The hands appeared to be mostly "Dutch,"—that is, Danes and Scandinavians, with two or three from the sunnier parts of Europe, but all alike had nothing but black looks and unwilling obedi-

ence for orders. This was not perhaps remarkable, as I soon learned that orders were invariably prefaced with profanity and generally supplemented with blows. The first mate, a fine figure of a blond Swede named Anderson, with a handsome, brutal face, took the lead in this hazing. Fist, boot and belaying-pin were his instruments of persuasion, and he used them—not when he had an excuse, but whenever he had an opportunity. The skipper was less brutal; he held the men in awe by his snarl; and the second mate, who had brought me from the berg, seemed either less forcocious or less energetic. I suspected that he received an occasional tongue-lashing himself from his superiors, being an anomalous creature, neither officer nor man, with one foot aft and one in the forecastle.

On that first day my blood boiled more than once or twice at the sight of some wanton brutality, and I wondered that the men endured it. But I did not then realise the force of habitual discipline, backed as it was by the law.

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I had dinner in the captain's cabin, with the two mates and McCrimmon himself. It was a silent meal; no one said anything beyond a grunted request for some dish to be passed. The mates ate noisily and greedily, shooting curious, sidewise glances at me, and the skipper seemed involved in some gloomy meditation. The men stamped out as soon as they had finished, but McCrimmon motioned me to remain.

"Clear out, there," he growled to the steward who had served us, and he waited till the door was shut.

"Now, then," he began, "I've been thinking it all over—just tell me your story again, my man."

So I again rehearsed my partly true, partly invented tale of shipwreck.

"Did ye winter in Alaska?" he demanded.

"Yes," I lied, after a moment's hesitation.

He scrutinised me, and then, "You lie!" he pronounced.

"What do you mean by that!" I exclaimed, and I felt myself flush crimson with guilt.

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"I mean that you're a liar!" the skipper said grinsly. "Your face wouldn't be that colour if you'd wintered at Dawson or Nome. Your hands wouldn't look like that if you'd worked long in the mines. I've seen the Klondikers coming back, and they show where they've been. And further, d'ye know that I saw ye fling a man's body overboard from yon berg just before we took ye off?"

This startled me. "I found it there, frozen in the ice," I attempted to explain, but conscious how lame the explanation must sound.

"Hoot, toot!" the skipper exulted. "Dinna tell me such tales. There's been murder done on yon iceberg, and ye know too much, far too much about it—aye, and ye've far too much gold in your blanket. There's something wrang. I warn ye that I'll hand ye to the police in Hong-Kong, as soon as we get there, and meanwhile I'll just take charge of that gold of yours, which I greatly misdoubt ye ha' no come by honestly."

"You can't do that. The law——" I began, hotly.

"The law? I'm the law here. And ye can thank your stars that I'm not a hard man, or I'd put ye in irons, or work ye to death with the crew. Bring your stolen gold here."

"Hanged if I do!" I ejaculated, and, turning, I bolted for my own cabin where the gold lay, with the notion in my mind that I would throw it overboard before I let it into the Scotchman's grip.

I heard his feet at my heels. I gained the door of my cabin, however; I was inside it, when a blow on the back of my head, coupled with a lurch of the ship, sent me sprawling forward on my face. I looked up to find myself confronted with the black muzzle and the loaded chambers of a revolver.

I am certain that McCrimmon longed for resistance, that he might shoot me then and there. I was wise enough to lie motionless, however, and for half a minute we gazed at one another in the gloom of the tiny cabin.

Then the captain coolly rummaged through my bunk till he found the heavily-weighted blanket. It was not so heavy as it had been,

but, luckily, he did not seem to notice the difference. He slung it over his shoulder, and glanced at me again, with an unholy gleam of triumph in his eye.

"On deck with ye, now," he said, sharply. "Get up. I'm not a hard man, or ye'd be lying with your brains oozing. But let me hear a whisper from ye again, and I'll make your life such that ye'll be glad to throw yourself overboard afore ever ye sight the China coast."

I believed him, as I arose sullenly and went toward the companion stairs, while he disappeared into his cabin again, slamming the door. I was convinced now that I had blundered into one of the worst predicaments that had yet befallen me. I was certain that McCrimmon intended to rob me of my little fortune. No one else knew that the gold was on board, and I turned cold to think of the numberless ways in which I might be made to disappear without attracting any notice on that floating hell.

And even if the captain's intentions were

honest, which I was unable to believe, I foresaw the wreck of all my hopes if I had to deal with the Hong-Kong police. I foresaw the stolid incredulity of the British magistrate at my explanation of the gold dust in my possession, of the corpse which I had been seen to heave into the sea. To be sure, no crime could be definitely proved against me, but by the time I had cleared myself of suspicion my iceberg would be melted and my gold at the bottom of the Pacific.

By that time, also, affairs in Goldendale would be past mending, and Jessie would be beyond—I shivered, stung to the necessity of action, of immediate, decisive action. And the first thing was to get free of this *Oregonian*, this floating inferno.

I paced up and down the deck amidships with feverish impatience. Every hour, every minute was infinitely precious. My iceberg was out of sight in the east, I knew not how many miles astern.

The captain had come on deck again, after locking up my gold, and he was walking to

and fro stiffly by the stern. He did not vouchsafe me a glance, but I felt his eye on me, and as I looked at his cunning, degraded face I felt that there was no mercy there.

A little further forward I noticed Conover, the second mate, leaning idly on the rail, or perhaps he was really superintending three or four of the men who were doing something with a heavy hawser. Instinct led me to walk forward to speak to him. I felt the need of a friendly human voice, and I remembered that he had spoken gently on the berg.

"Making good speed, aren't we?" I remarked, uncertain how to open a conversation.

He looked sidewise at me sourly, and made no reply.

"I hope you don't think I'm crazy still," I went on, without being discouraged.

"If you're not crazy you'll show it by keeping aft, and keeping to yourself—and looking out for yourself mighty sharp!" he added in a lower tone.

I heard a tread on the planks behind me,

and before I could reply I was whirled violently around to face the skipper, who had clutched my arm.

"What d'ye mean by talking to my officers and keeping them from their duty? Go aft, and let me see ye do it no more. And you, Mr. Conover——" with deadly irony—"what might ye have been conversing with him about?"

"I was giving him some good advice," growled the second mate.

"Who ordered ye to advise him? Let him be, as I told ye to do. And dinna glower at me like that, ye lousy whelp!" he suddenly barked, "or, by God, I'll flatten in your ugly face!"

Conover gave the captain another "glower," and then turned away with a hoarse grumble of rage. McCrimmon looked fiercely after him for a moment, gave me a ferocious glance, and then returned to the stern, swelling with victorious wrath.

But to me this scene brought a blaze of illumination. There was bad blood, then,

even among the officers! It would be hard if I could not bring help to myself out of it all, and I was prepared to stick at no risk.

I would gladly have taken any risk, if I could only see by what end to take hold. My ignorance of the politics of the ship was so complete that I did not know how to begin, how to carry out my vague plan of playing off Conover and the crew against the captain and the first mate. I did not want to stir up a mutiny exactly; at least I certainly wanted no violence, and I did not realise that mutiny and violence must be the inevitable result of tampering with the reign of terror that prevailed on board the brig. All that I knew then, or all that I thought of, was that I wanted my liberty, and that I was determined not to go to Hong-Kong.

Supper was an even more silent meal than dinner. There was tension in the air. As soon as the repast was over I went on deck, and stayed there till late, hoping for an opportunity of speaking unobserved with

Conover. But I found none. Either the captain or Anderson was always there, and I felt myself watched.

Finally Conover disappeared from the deck. He did not reappear, and after some waiting I went down to my berth and found him preparing to turn in. We were alone in the cabin.

"Conover," I said in an eager whisper, seizing the opportunity, "do you like this sort of thing?"

"What d'ye mean?" he replied, harshly.

"Do you like this ship? Do you like the skipper? Do you like the sea? Would you throw it up, if you could?"

I was unaccustomed to the arts of corruption, and I stammered in my nervousness and eagerness.

"Who wouldn't chuck it if he could?" the second mate growled. "What's the use of talking like that?"

"The use is this," I proceeded. "I've got close to—well, three thousand dollars in gold on board——"

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He glanced up from the bunk where he had thrown himself, and in the smoky light of the swinging oil lamp I saw his face, suddenly keen with surprise, apprehension, doubt—and perhaps desire.

"The old metal I had in my blanket—that was gold dust from Alaska. I was wrecked on that berg on my way home. The skipper has stolen it from me, and he's got it now. Help me to get it back, and half of it is yours if you'll have the ship put back to the States before she goes any farther."

"What—mutiny?" he ejaculated.

"No, no. Not mutiny. Simply——"

"What are you driving at, then?" he said. "Hush up, quick!" he added, and, relaxing himself, he closed his eyes and began to snore. The next minute Anderson, the mate, entered and proceeded to turn in.

Disappointed as I was, I had sufficient presence of mind to proceed with my partial undressing without showing any perturbation. Conover's feigned slumber gave me the highest hopes of success, since he was pre-

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pared to deceive his officers already to listen to my proposals. I hoped that either he or Anderson would be obliged to go on duty on deck later in the night, so that, either below or on deck, I would have an opportunity of resuming my work of seduction.

I tried to keep awake, and at first I had no difficulty. Anderson had begun to snore; Conover had ceased; both were asleep. After a time I too found myself dozing, and awakening sharply, until I slept at last soundly, to be aroused by a trampling of feet and the sound of the mate going on deck.

I glanced at Conover. He was awake too, and met my eye. I had my mouth open to speak when the door opened, and the skipper's yellow-white beard appeared in the dim lamplight.

"On deck, Mr. Conover!" he said sharply. Then he glanced at me.

"Ye're no sleeping, young man. To-morrow night ye'll bunk in my cabin, where you'll maybe be snugger."

My heart sank at this prospect, and the

malicious Scotchman grinned at me from the door till Conover had gone up, and returned to his cabin; but in a few minutes the second mate stole down the stairs.

"Come up forrard of the foremast where it's dark in fifteen minutes," he whispered, and swiftly vanished again.

I heard the captain turning into his bunk. As for me, I waited, counting the minutes, listening for sounds from McCrimmon's room. Then I waited for ten minutes more, all a-quiver with expectation of something decisive, for Conover's last words had put beyond doubt the fact that he was at least subject to temptation.

Finally I crept on deck. It was a dark night, warm and cloudy. The canvas loomed overhead like a towering cloud, and the brig was running fast, it seemed to me, throwing jets of spray occasionally over her rail as she heeled under the fresh breeze.

I found Conover in the darkness, where he had told me to look for him. No one was near us; the mate was just distinguishable at

the stern. Conover peered keenly into my face as I came up.

"It's you. Now say what you've got to say, and say it quick!" he muttered under his breath.

"I've said it," I replied, in the same guarded tone. "There's close to two thousand in gold for you if you'll set me ashore within a week anywhere within five miles of an American railway station."

"How do I know you've got it?"

"You felt the weight of the blanket. There was nothing in it but gold. And," I rummaged in my pocket, "here, take this anyway," and I gave him a small nugget about the size of a bean, which had come from the Russian's pouch.

"You say the skipper's got the gold," inquired Conover, pocketing the lump.

"Yes, he took it from me. He says he'll hand it over to the police in Hong-Kong."

The seaman gave a short laugh.

"I guess I know the old man! Do you know, he didn't write anything in the log

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book about picking you up? I guess he thinks there'll be an accident and you'll never see Hong-Kong."

My blood turned cold at this opinion, which so well confirmed my own fears.

"I don't intend to see Hong-Kong," I replied. "And if there's an accident I'll not be the only man to get hurt. But if you're game for what I propose, say so. I don't know how you can fix it. You'll have to settle the plan yourself, but I'll do all I can to help you get it settled."

Conover laughed shortly again.

"It won't take much plan to stir the hands up—not on this ship. But you'll have to give them something too—say fifty dollars apiece."

"That's agreed."

"And I reckon you'll want quick action for your money."

"Every day lost costs me about a thousand dollars," I assured him.

The second mate chewed on the proposition for a time.

"I don't like the game," he complained.

"It's no pretty piece of business. Of course I'd lose my ticket, and we'd all be lucky if we didn't get pulled for piracy."

The ugly word gave me a shock. I hesitated in my turn, for I had not contemplated any such risk as that.

"But then, I can lie low for a while—change my name or something," the mate went on. "The men can look out for themselves, and I reckon you know your own business."

"Quite so," I agreed, though feeling less assurance than I expressed.

"I'll kind of sound one or two of the hands to-night," he suddenly decided. "If we put it through I'll quit the sea. There's nothing in it but hard knocks. But mind you, Mister Man, if you don't come down with the stuff according to agreement, there'll be a knife through you, and mighty quick at that!"

"You fix the men. The gold is as safe as if you had it," I said. "The skipper has it somewhere in his cabin. But, look here, there mustn't be any piracy foolishness. I won't

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have anybody hurt. I'd rather lose all I've got."

It seemed to me that the seaman gave me a queer look in the gloom.

"Oh, I know how to persuade the old man," he replied.

I thought that perhaps he did. I went back to my bunk and counted the hours that were carrying me further from where my heart was and my treasure, until I fell into intermittent dreams of violence and death, of gold and blood and the black flag, and drifting through it all I seemed to see the *señorita* and the red-haired Irishman of Vermilion.

CHAPTER V

MUTINY

I AWOKE at last from these visions to see daylight filtering through the little porthole and filling the dusky smoulder of the lamp. I dozed again, and through my doze I was aware of Conover coming below, accompanied by the first mate.

They were gone again when I became broad awake. I met Conover at the breakfast table, but of course I had no opportunity of speaking with him there, though I was burning to know whether he had done anything upon anything, and whether he had sounded the crew. For his part he did not so much as glance in my direction, but after breakfast I watched for a chance to approach him. I followed him in a casual way, and edged toward him when he was unnoticing.

"Keep away from me, you "

in a furious whisper. "D'you want
give it all away?"

"Have you fixed anything?" I could not
ask in spite of risk.

"Now. See soon. Look out."

For the skipper had come on
and his eye on me, I thought. I
glanced differently away, and the Scotch-
man

He said nothing, that is, to me, but he re-
flected himself by what he said to the crew.
The first mate ably seconded him, and when
it became necessary to make more sail in the
course of the forenoon, there was an exhibi-
tion of blasphemy and the abuse that
could scarcely have been heard, I think,
anywhere on the high seas.

But I could not help noticing a certain
change in the temper of the men, or rather
in some of them. There had been black looks
before, but now they were not concealed.
The hands grumbled almost audibly; they
went about their work with a free and easy
indifference, like men who obey only so long

as they choose to obey, and I saw one or two of them look at me with a secret significance, as if I were a party to their rebellious spirit. So I was, indeed, and yet I felt a vague alarm at the forces I had set in motion. Conover had dropped the match in the powder magazine with a vengeance.

And yet I do not think that the final explosion was my doing, or the second mate's. Conover, in fact, afterwards assured me that he had not tampered with the men who directly occasioned it; though no doubt, but for our machinations, it would have been a mere spasm of revolt, instantly quenched in blood.

McCrimmon and Anderson were not slow to notice the change in the manner of the hands, and blows and curses were kept going briskly. The men were to be cowed out of their insubordination as, I suppose, they had been cowed before, and the skipper presently went below and returned with a great bulge in his hip pocket which he took no trouble to conceal.

Only a few of the men were aware that anything was being plotted, but mysteriously the spirit of revolt had spread like a contagion through the whole ship. Some kind of collision was inevitable, and I wondered whether the officers would be able to carry it off with a rough hand as usual.

But in one way or another the forenoon passed without open outbreak. The men scowled and grumbled, but obeyed, and swallowed the usual amount of bullying. I began to fear that my plans would be wrecked again, for, after all, time was my deadliest enemy.

It was a fine afternoon, that day, so pregnant with incident, with a caressing warmth in the air. The sky was clear, the sea was deeply blue, marked with the long lines of small white-caps, and a light breeze blew almost fair from the south. But few on board the *Oregonian* cared to observe the glory of the weather.

The state of tension continued till the middle of the afternoon. About that time, one of

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the Italian seamen, who had been a special butt for brutality of our officers, happened to spill a couple of pints of tar and grease from a bucket with which he was about to slush down the mast.

Instantly the skipper was upon him with a blow in the face that sent him staggering back with blood bursting from his nose. But the Italian, much the bigger man of the two, recovering himself, lunged forward in his turn, and the skipper went down with a crash on the deck. As he lay he drew his revolver and shot the Italian down.

At the noise of the scuffle and at the report there was a rush to the spot. The watch below came tumbling up from the forecastle. The mate was on the spot, bellowing blasphemies, almost before the pistol-smoke had blown away.

"Pick the blasted dago up. He ain't dead, d—n him!" screamed Captain McCrimmon, who had regained his feet, bursting with wrath.

At this, Anderson dealt a brutal kick to the



“ Pick the blasted dago up. He ain't dead!” screamed ‘Captain McCrimmon’ ”



wounded man, who writhed over on his side with a groan, showing the deck crimson under him.

I started forward to protest, but a second Italian anticipated me. With a movement so quick that I barely detected it, he balanced his knife on his hand, and threw it. I saw only the flicker of the steel, and then the mate reeled back with the streaming knife-handle standing from his neck, and collapsed against the rail.

Hell broke loose on that deck. With a wild-beast howl the whole crew poured down on the captain. His pistol flashed twice. I hardly heard the reports above the uproar; I saw only the jets of smoke, but his bullets seemed to take no effect. He was swamped, beaten down on the deck in an instant, and concealed and covered with the mob of cursing and shouting men.

All this was far more than I bargained for. At the murder of the mate I had stood almost paralysed with horror, but now I rushed forward and tried to fight my way into the

mêlée. Conover backed me up, and between us we managed to drag the skipper out and pull our bloodhounds off. McCrimmon was bleeding from several cuts on his face and neck, his face was badly bruised, but he did not seem to be seriously hurt. He was not even insensible, and he turned his eyes upon us with a glare of venomous hatred.

"What'll we do with him?" I inquired.

"Lock him in his cabin, I reckon," said Conover, looking gloomy. "Might be better if we let the men finish him, though!"

"My God! hasn't there been violence enough?" I exclaimed. "Didn't I tell you that I wanted no bloodshed?"

"Yes, but I didn't think you were fool enough to mean it," retorted my accomplice.

This conversation was carried on in a voice too low for either the captain or the crew to hear. The skipper leaned on the rail, mechanically wiping blood from his face, barely able to keep his feet after the rough handling he had received. The crew were standing back, half fierce, half frightened at

their own deeds. Duty was suspended; even the man at the wheel had run forward in his excitement, and if a squall ' come at that moment we would infallibly have been dismasted.

"Oleson, go back to the wheel!" Conover ordered sharply, as soon as he observed this state of affairs. "Watch on deck, stand by, and look sharp. Somebody carry that dago below and see if you can't do something for him."

The helmsman went slowly back to his post. The men moved about uncertainly, half dazed, still under the terrible spell of murder. No one lifted a hand to assist the wretched Italian, who still lay bleeding where he had fallen.

"Come now, look sharp," commanded the second mate.

"We've done up the skipper an' the mate, and blast me if we'll be hazed by you!" grumbled one of the Norsemen.

"There'll be no more hazing," said Conover. "But the ship has to be navigated,

hasn't she? If you don't want me to do it, you can elect a captain yourselves, like regular pirates. But you'll find that you've got to have a man at the wheel and you've got to have a watch on deck, if you don't want the sticks taken out of her. Here," turning to me, "let's get the old man below."

The skipper was in too shattered a condition to resist anything that we might have done to him, and we half carried, half led him down to his cabin, where we put him in his bunk.

"I'll see ye both stretch ropes for this," he observed, weakly but still with defiance.

"This has been none of our doing, Captain McCrimmon," I said. "I wanted to get home, but not badly enough for this, and I'd give all the gold you tried to steal from me if it had never happened. You'll bear witness, too, that we saved your life from the men."

To this the skipper made no response, but closed his eyes in real or feigned unconsciousness.

"We might as well have a look at that same gold," observed the mate.

I was anxious to have a look at it myself, but the difficulty was to know where the captain had stowed it. We rummaged all the nooks and corners of his cabin, and at last decided upon a locked sea-chest, the only thing that we could not open. Conover brought an axe and we burst the lock. I felt horribly like a real pirate as we did it, but there, on the very top of a collection of clothing, books and small articles, lay my knotted blanket. Its weight told me at once that its contents were nearly, if not altogether, as I had left them.

I untied the knots. There lay the dead yellow nuggets, and the heaps of faintly shining scales and dust. This was only a little more than half of my treasure. I had a considerable quantity of dust upon my person, but I judged it wisest to keep the existence of this hoard to myself, at least for the present.

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Conover looked disappointed as he leaned over the little treasure.

"Hell! This ain't anything!" he said. "How much did you say it was worth?"

"It's worth more than it looks," I replied. "That stuff is worth, roughly, about two hundred and fifty dollars a pound. You can lift it for yourself and judge how much there is."

Conover "hefted" the blanket, and his face brightened.

"Heavy, ain't it!" he exclaimed. "Must be seven or eight pounds anyway. Let's divvy it now," he added, after poking his fingers into the heap.

I could not well refuse, and in fact it would be a real advantage to me to have part of the gold out of my charge. We found the captain's scales, the same which he had used in weighing the dust for my passage-money, and we divided the metal into two equal shares. Conover insisted on having most of the nuggets and coarse gold. He had an idea that they were more valuable, and I made no

objection, for I knew that the fine dust could be more conveniently packed and carried.

"But how about the money we're going to give the crew?" I suddenly remembered to say.

Conover looked downcast, and then grim.

"You'll have to look out for that," he said.

"I'm blamed sure that my share's none to big now to pay for risking my neck. Offer 'em twenty dollars apiece; that'll seem a whole lot, when they don't expect to get anything. Or, of course, you don't need to give them anything at all."

"No, I owe them something," I declared.

"Then you'll have to pay it yourself."

"I'll pay it myself, then," I said, in some disgust, and glad now that I had concealed the fact that I had half the treasure secreted on my person.

We stowed away the gold again, regretting now that the lock of the chest was broken. The skipper seemed to be still insensible, but we took the precaution of tying him hand and foot in his berth, and of locking the cabin

door when we went out. Conover kept the key, and thus constituted himself the guardian of the treasure—a move which I regarded with some apprehension.

When we returned on deck we found the men standing about in groups, with uncertainty and alarm on every face. They were like dogs that have killed sheep, and if there had been the slightest force of authority left on board I am certain that the mutiny could have been put down in an instant. The red pools still lay on the deck, spreading with the rolling of the ship, but the wounded Italian had been taken below.

The first mate's body still lay huddled by the rail, the knife still in his throat—a spectacle that I did not care to regard.

"Come now, boys, swab down that deck!" cried Conover. "And let's get *that* overboard," pointing to the corpse.

The men did not move. They murmured uncertainly among themselves, and then one of the Northlanders stepped forward.

"Me an' my mates wants to know first what

we're going to do, and then who's in command of this ship, and lastly where we're goin'," he said, with rough emphasis, and a mutter of approval arose behind him.

"You want to have it all settled before you do anything, do you?" said the mate. "Very well, let's have it out. Who's to command this ship? Well, who can lay a course or take the latitude? Can any of you? Then I'll command her myself till some of you learn navigation. Has anybody got anything to say against that?"

They showed no enthusiasm at this speech, but no one made any objection. I was unspeakably relieved, for I had feared that a second mutiny was brewing.

"Now where we're going and what we're going to do," the mate continued, evidently encouraged. "I'll tell you what we'll do, if we're wise. We'll steer for the nearest shore, we'll scuttle the brig at night and take to the boats. Once ashore we'll scatter, and then all we have to do is to keep our mouths shut.

"Now then, where'll we steer for? Well,

this gentleman here," indicating me, "is a miner from Alaska. He's got five hundred dollars in gold on board and he'll divide it among the whole ship's company, share and share alike, if we put him ashore in the States. We can make it in four or five days with the wind we've got; we'll go ashore in the boats, the brig'll be out of sight, and we'll all have money in our pockets to lie low for a while, and then we can all ship out of Portland in different deepwater ships and forget all about the *Oregonian*. What do you say to that?"

The mention of five hundred dollars produced a marvellous effect. It was a sum which I dare say none of these men had ever seen, and each forgot that he was to receive dazzled him. The faces of the crew cleared only a small share of it; the whole amount like magic at Conover's oration. They thought that they saw their difficulties vanish, and they broke into an involuntary cheer. My confederate and I were in control of the situation, for the time, at least.

In a twinkling the ugly stains on the deck were mopped up and the buckets of crimsoned water thrown overboard. We wrapped the body of the first mate in a blanket, and lashed a quantity of old iron in with it.

"Skipper ought to read the prayer out of the book," muttered one of the men, when these preparations were completed.

Conover's face fell, and he glanced at me. I shook my head. I could not have said or read any prayer over the body of the man for whose death I felt myself partly responsible. Conover hesitated, with a sailor's superstition.

"We haven't got any book," he said at last. "Heave him over. Hats off."

The Italian seamen crossed themselves, the others stood bareheaded as the corpse went over the rail with a great splash. The brig raced past. Conover looked back at the rising bubbles.

"Many's the sailorman that's had a worse funeral," he said. Then, raising his voice sharply, "Lively now, men. The quicker

we raise United States land the safer we'll be. Stand by to go about!"

The hands, snatched out of their brooding, sprang to their stations with alacrity. The sails flapped thunderously as they shifted position, and the great ship, obeying influences that were mysterious to me, began to wheel slowly, and to zig-zag round in the opposite direction. The canvas filled again, but from the other side, and the *Oregonian* began to make speed eastward as fast as she had been rushing toward China.

I drew a long breath of relief. After so much failure and so much fault I was headed right at last. In a few days I would be ashore, still with money enough to hunt down my moving and melting mine. I abandoned myself to making plans. I would send for Pill by telegraph as soon as I got ashore, for there would be no time to go to Goldendale. We would recover our iceberg, and get back to California in plenty of time to redeem the situation.

But my hands were stained with blood. It

was not by intention, certainly, but I should have foreseen the result of tampering with the discipline of the ship, and such a ship! In the eyes of the law we were, as Conover had hinted, little better than pirates. Had I known, I told myself vainly, I would have allowed the captain to rob me; I would have gone to China and taken my chances. It was too late, now; remorse was useless, but I promised myself that if we recovered the iceberg I would recompense the *Oregonian's* owners through some secret channel. But for the blood shed there could be no recompense.

"Well, all's well for the present," said Conover's voice at my shoulder. "It went off better than I expected. The hard thing now will be to keep the men busy and amused till we sight land. One of us will always have to be on deck, day and light. Have you got a gun?"

I had not; my pistol had been lost in the wreck.

"We'll get the old man's revolver, and the mate's. We'll have to watch the old man

mighty close too. Oh, it'll be no picnic getting away with it all! Are you glad you done it?" with a side glance at me.

"What's the use of talking about it?" I replied. "No, I'm not glad. I'd have given away all the gold, I'd have dropped it overboard first, if I'd known how it would turn out."

"Same here," said the mate. "Made a kind of nasty noise, didn't it, when that knife took Anderson in the throat? It kind of sticks in my crop. He wasn't such a bad fellow, Anderson, when you got to know him. Say, have you thought what we'd do with the old man?"

The question startled me. No, I had not considered what to do with the Scotch skipper. We could hardly take him ashore and release him to lay information against us."

"We ought to have let the men do him up," Conover said, in a hoarse whisper. "We might, yet——"

"No, we mightn't!" I cried. "That was a fair fight. This would be murder of the

blackest sort. We'll have to take him with us, and we'll have to take our chances, that's all."

"Take our chances! We won't have any. The first thing the old man will do when he gets ashore will be to swear out warrants for all of us."

"We might make him swear to us to say nothing, if we save his life," I suggested.

Conover said nothing, evidently with little faith in this plan. In fact, I had not much myself.

"Don't worry for a while yet," I said, after a silent minute or two. "We'll figure out what to do with him to make him safe without killing him."

I endeavoured to speak cheerfully, but I felt the black weight of the danger.

CHAPTER XI

HOMeward BOUND

So that day passed over, and the next, and quietly enough. The men remained silent, gloomy, apparently almost as discontented as they had been before the mutiny, but now it was the fear of the law that was weighing on them. As for Conover and me, we stood guard alternately, day and night, with one eye continually on the fore-castle and one on the cabin where the skipper was kept locked and tied.

The question of what to do with him remained unsolved, though we discussed it often enough. The Scotchman was a great embarrassment to us in those days, for we had to carry his meals to him and attend upon him like an invalid, with the constant dread that he might escape and manage to resume authority aboard, and the certainty that he would hang some of us if he got ashore alive. What

he was thinking of himself I could only guess, for he scarcely spoke during the five days of our run home. That is, he scarcely spoke to me, but, as will appear, I had reason to believe that he conversed more freely with Conover.

I had taken the precaution to go through his log-book and to ascertain the latitude and longitude of the brig on the day when I was picked up. This would be a valuable clue, and my only one, to finding the iceberg again by calculating its probable rate of drift southward. As Conover had told me, the log contained no mention of my having been picked up, no word whatever of my being on board, and the first mate's log showed the same omission. The purpose of this was too obvious to be mistaken, and it caused me to feel just a shade less of regret for Anderson's fate.

It was not long before I began to suspect that Conover, in spite of his boasts to the crew, was no navigator. He may have been a good seaman; I knew nothing of that. But when he took his observations he always dis-

played considerable uncertainty as to our exact position on the chart, and he usually ended by saying, "Put it there, anyhow. We ain't trying to make any particular port, and that's near enough," and he would make a heavy cross with his pencil on the spot which he had selected—at random, as I more than half believed. It was true, however, that we were steering for no particular port, and America was too large a mark to miss, so long as we preserved a generally eastward course, so that I did not waste much anxiety over our reckless style of navigation.

But on the second day I detected him in a more dangerous fault. When I came on deck to take my watch I observed an unusually benevolent expression on his face, apparent even at a distance. At closer range I caught a reeking whiff of spirits upon his breath.

It startled me like a thunder-clap, and in that instant I saw all kinds of disaster.

"Conover, you've been drinking. Have you lost your senses, to do a thing like that?" I accused him, sternly.

The mate grinned at me, with great cheerfulness.

"'S not so bad's that," he said. "Come and have a horn yourself—nothing to do—might's well keep happy."

"You'd better go below," I said. "You're not such a fool as to let the men see you drunk, are you?"

He winked at me with infinite slyness. He was not drunk, in fact; he was fuddled, but quite capable of walking and talking. Liquor evidently mellowed him, and he was in a condition to pass the bottle jovially to all hands, but the *Oregonian's* good angel had prevented him from doing this. He went below at my suggestion, and when I descended after half an hour I found him in his bunk asleep and apparently dead drunk.

I took the opportunity of going through the cabin, and the three bottles of California brandy that I found I threw overboard, devoutly hoping that there was no more. I allowed Conover to sleep for a couple of

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hours, and then I pulled him out of his berth and doused him liberally with cold water.

He was still intoxicated enough to be good-natured.

"Hell of a trick to play on a fellow!" he remonstrated, dripping, and he blinked at me for some time as he sat on the floor, till he seemed to come more clearly to himself.

"Guess I'll go up and look after the men," he remarked, and proceeded to stumble up the companion-way.

I followed him, dismayed, and scarcely daring to guess what might happen. But Conover walked to the quarter rail with a fairly steady step, and stood looking forward along the deck with an air of extraordinary gravity. Fortunately no orders seemed to be required at the time, and after he had stood there for half an hour or so he resumed control of the navigation with apparent soberness.

My relief can hardly be described that the thing had passed over so well. But next day the mate came on deck again half-seas over, and the same thing was repeated on the day

after. It could no longer be concealed from the hands; but danger had made the crew serious and there was always a man at the wheel and a watch on deck.

I tried to discover where Conover kept his liquor, or where he procured it, but in vain. I suspected that the skipper might have maliciously informed him where it was to be procured, and I dreaded that McCrimmon might persuade my confederate, in the sloppy good-nature of drunkenness, to set him free—perhaps even to take sides against me.

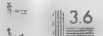
In this suspicion I think that I wronged my accomplice, however. He was weak, indolent, at times violent, but there was no treachery in him. Expostulations were of no use against his drunkenness, however; he scowled when he was sober and grinned when he was drunk, nor could I wring any admission from him, drunk or sober, as to where he obtained his intoxicants.

During those last three days of the voyage the ship pretty much sailed herself, and by the greatest good luck we had fair weather



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and steady, moderate winds. It was impossible to tell when this might change, however, and as Conover made little more than a pretence of standing watch I kept vigil alone. I slept scarcely three hours out of the twenty-four, and never in my life, not even while on the berg, have I spent such hours of utter and desolate loneliness as when I walked the deck of that stolen ship at midnight, a loaded revolver in my pocket, with a mutinied crew, an imprisoned captain and a dead drunk navigator, and ten pounds of raw gold aboard to stir the crew to new murders if they learned of it.

Late in the afternoon of the fifth day after the mutiny I was standing at the stern, almost senseless with weariness and hunger for sleep, but afraid to close my eyes. Conover was in his berth, as I had just ascertained, and I had at least the satisfaction of knowing that he was in no condition to plot with the skipper.

No observations had been taken that day, or the day before, for that matter, but it

seemed to me that we must surely be approaching the American coast. I had been sweeping the horizon all day with the glasses of the dead mate, without being able to make out any break in the sea line; and it seemed to me that the men shared my surmise, for I noticed that one of them was always in the rigging, though no orders had been given.

A little before sunset one of these men descended and conferred with one of his mates, who presently came to me.

"Jan there thinks as he's sighted land. He wants to have the lend of your glasses for a squint."

The man returned aloft with the glass, looked, and slid down the stay again.

"Land's in sight sure enough, sir," he said.

All the men on deck looked at me, doubtful what to do, now the crisis was at hand. Thus placed in command I felt at a loss.

"Well, men, I'm no sailor, you know," I said. "But we don't want to be sighted from shore, do we? I think we'd better stop the

ship and stay here till dark. And get ready to lower the boats."

"That's good sense," approved one of the men, at which I was encouraged.

I ran down to the cabin where Conover lay asleep, and shook him violently.

"Wake up!" I roared in his ear. "Land's in sight."

He opened his eyes, grunted, and stared dizzily. I emptied a bucket of water over him.

"Get up, you drunken hound!" I shouted. "Land's in sight. What'll we do?"

"Land?" he echoed. "Where are we?" He rolled out of his bunk and wiped the water from his face and eyes. "Time to take to the boats, eh? Let's go on deck."

He blundered up the stairs somehow, with my help from behind and once on deck he took the glasses. I had been unable to make out anything, but his trained vision at once detected the coast, unsteady as he was.

"It's land all right," he said, with a silly waggle of his head. "We've done the trick."

Boys, get your dunnage up and stand by to go ashore. Who's hove her to? That's right!"

While I was below the hands had brought the ship to a standstill, and she lay almost motionless, heaving on the regular swell. I could not see another sail on the ocean.

"What are we going to do with the ship? And what in the name of heaven are we going to do with the skipper?" I demanded of Conover, at my wits' end with perplexity.

The mate evidently tried to bring his still dizzy brain to grapple with these problems, and I watched him in despair when I observed all the crew approaching us in a body.

"Beg pardon, sir, but that five hundred dollars you promised us——" the spokesman began.

Conover laughed at my dismay.

"By Jove, I had forgotten it!" I exclaimed. "Wait a minute, and you shall have it."

I ran below, found the door of the captain's room still locked with the key in the mate's

pocket. There was no time for delay, however, and I burst the door open with my foot and entered, to find the skipper considerably disturbed at my violent incoming. No doubt he believed that I had come to murder him.

I paid no attention to him, however, but opened the chest and untied the blanket. Conover had removed his share, along with some of mine, I think, to some hiding-place best known to himself, and I hastily ladled out what seemed about thirty ounces of the dust and poured it into an empty tobacco tin that stood handy.

The rest—there was not much—I hastily wrapped in my handkerchief and thrust into my pocket. Then, with the tin in my hand, I mounted to the deck again.

But at the sight of the little box of gold dust a furious hu'bub arose. It was not enough; I suppose they had expected to see something like a gallon of yellow metal, and when it was quickly divided into lots, and each man saw himself in the possession of a mere pinch the dissatisfaction was universal.

Discipline was dead on the *Oregonian* and each man was ready to show his freedom.

"More! more!" they clamoured, surrounding me with threatening fists. "Where's the five hundred dollars?"

I saw Conover edge away and feel furtively toward his hip pocket, which convinced me that he had his own share about his person. As for me, I was determined not to give up another ounce.

"You fools, that's five hundred dollars, and more!" I expostulated.

"That? I could put that much in my eye!" shouted one of the seamen, and he flung his share contemptuously into the sea.

"What's the use of quarrelling over a dollar?" Conover suddenly broke out. "The brig's ours, ain't she? You'll find better picking below."

The men stared for one astonished instant.

"Thunder! he's right!" cried the man who had thrown away his dust. "Below, mates! We'll see what's in the hold!"

They had the fore-hatch off in a twinkling,

and one by one they dropped upon the cargo dimly seen below, to the last man, even to the man at the wheel. Conover and I were left alone on the deck, in the gathering dusk.

"They're going to bre into the cargo. We mustn't let them do t!" I exclaimed.

"Better that than have them break our skulls, and that's what they'd have done by this time," replied Conover, whom the danger seemed to have sobered. "Besides what's the odds?" he added. "The cargo was bound to be lost anyway."

But this act of outright piracy revolted me. Underfoot I could hear the calling of the men and the tumbling of bales and crates. Then a great shout arose from far down in the ship.

"They've found it," said the mate, calmly.

"What?"

"The booze," with a swift, oblique glance at me.

"There's liquor in the hold?"

"A dozen casks of California brandy," replied Conover.

I knew now where he had obtained his drinks, but the knowledge was of no use. The problem was what we should do with the men when they would presently return to the deck, ferociously drunk. They were quiet enough now; I imagined them gathering like flies around the cask by the light of a lantern that I could see glimmering, and I waited in agonised impatience for five, ten, fifteen minutes. Then I ran down to the skipper's cabin and cut him loose from his bonds.

"The crew have broken cargo, Captain," I hurriedly explained. "God knows what will happen. We're going to take to the boats presently. You must stay here quietly till you hear me call."

The Scotchman swung his legs out of the and eyed me, sour as ever.

"If ye think that this'll make any differ to ye in court——" he began.

"I don't think! I don't care!" I interrupted angrily. "Serve us all right, I suppose, if we hang!"

I heard a dry chuckle from McCrimmon

as I dashed up the stairs again. The men were still below. In the gathering darkness I made out Conover at the wheel, and noticed that the ship was slowly in motion again toward the east.

In a few minutes more the men began to come up, drunk as I expected, and laden with armfuls of miscellaneous plunder from the hold. There were no lights on board; not even the binnacle lamp was burning, and their shadowy forms were vague in the darkness as they reeled about the deck, cursing, quarrelling, singing, vaguely looking for something more to drink, destroy or steal.

Conover and I sheltered ourselves behind the wheel, and hoped to escape notice, but one of the seamen approached us in his meanderings.

"It's you!" he yelled, with a tremendous blasphemy. "Where's that five hundred dollars in gold? Out with it now, and be quick—or——"

I flung down the handkerchief in which I had wrapped the rest of my dust, for half a

dozen more hands were coming up, attracted by the noise. They fell upon it in a struggling heap; in another moment I expected to see knives drawn, when it seemed to me that a gust of some sharp odour came to my nostrils.

"What's that smoke?" exclaimed Conover at the same instant, and he ran forward.

I followed him. A suffocating cloud, invisible in the gloom, was rising from the fore-hatch, and in its depths I could see a reddish glow. As we leaned over, a sudden bluish flash shot up, a blast of flame so hot that it scorched my face, and I recognised the fume of burning alcohol.

"The spirits!" I cried.

"On deck! on deck!" Conover bellowed down the hatch, and then glanced round the deck. Tongues of flame were now lapping above the coamings, casting a weird glare over the ship.

"There must be two men still below. No use trying to get them up now. There's about fifty tons of lard in the hold," he added.

In fact the smell of the burning lard began to be added to the reek. The men on deck, half sobered by the peril, were at the davits already, trying to get the boats overboard. I could feel the deck growing hot under my feet, and I rushed to the head of the companion-way.

"McCrimmon! On deck—quick!" I screamed.

"Let him alone, you fool!" roared the mate; but as he spoke the gaunt face of the skipper appeared above the deck. The men shrank back in horror; I fancy they had believed him dead; but he cast one glance aloft and one forward at the rising fire, and said not a word.

Over went the first boat, with a crash into the water, and she was full of men in an instant. The second followed, and there was a scramble, pell-mell to reach it. I found myself sliding down a line without knowing how I had reached it; I dropped into the bows of the boat on top of the man before me, and another figure tumbled upon my

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"He raved on, screeching over our heads"

head. This last, it appeared was the captain.

"Push off, men. Get under way, for God's sake!" cried Conover.

The great sides of the brig towered black above us, and there was a red glare on her rigging from the flaming hold. At any moment the fire might break above decks. We were huddled higgledy-piggledy in the boat, with the oars unshipped, and there was a lively half minute before some kind of order was obtained, and a couple of oars were at work.

We moved away slowly. We were not a dozen lengths distant when a great burst of flame shot up from the deck to the height of the main-top. With a roar the fore-sail flashed into a cloud of flame, blew loose from the yards and fell hissing into the sea; and one after another the canvas blazed up, higher, higher, to the very peak, and the yards began to flare, and the masts themselves.

We had three pairs of oars out now, and yet the distance from the burning ship did not seem to increase. The inflammable nature of

her cargo made her burn with terrible heat and rapidity, and the hot blast scorched our gunwales. A hundred yards away I saw our other boat, rowing fast through the red glare that overspread the sea.

"Faster! faster, men!" Conover shouted. "Don't you see? She's drifting down on us!"

It was true. A little breeze had sprung up, and the brig was driving down toward us, unsteered, but with increasing speed. Everyone had a hand on an oar now, pulling or pushing, except Conover, who steered, and the skipper who crouched in the bows, a silent figure, his eyes fixed on the mountain of flame that was once his ship.

The mate swung us round at right angles, and none too soon, for the *Oregonian* swept past at a distance of less than fifty yards, a mighty roaring pyre, that scattered flakes of fire over the sea for a hundred yards around. The water foamed under her blazing bows, then she came up suddenly in the wind with some lurch of her rudder, reeled and plunged off again in another direction. For a knot or

two she held this course, then yawed drunkenly and veered off again before the wind.

Free now from immediate danger, the men lay on their oars to watch the appalling sight of her burning. She was no longer a ship, she was only a lofty pyramid of fire that floated here and there like some stupendous will-o'-the-wisp. Then, with a terrific crash, her masts went, one after another, roaring into the sea with a quenching hiss, and half the conflagration was gone.

A sort of groan, a gasp, broke from the men at this catastrophe, but the skipper rose to his feet in the bows, where he had been forgotten.

"There she goes—the bonniest ship man ever sailed!" he cried, pointing over our heads. "And God's curse on the man that put the fire till her! May fire blast you too, you hound that came out of the sea to set my men against me!—and you, Conover! and you, ye mutinous dogs!" with a fierce gesture sweeping the crew, who cowered under his uplifted arm. "I'll see the lot of ye swing

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for this—aye, hanged by the neck till ye're all dead, and the fires o' hell ye'll find main hotter than the fire ye've lighted to-night! Black curse on all your heads, for——”

He raved on, screeching over our heads, in the red light that now burned low on the water, till I saw an oar suddenly swung. It crashed on his head with a crushing sound; the screaming voice stopped. There was a heavy splash in the sea alongside; and in another instant we were flying at the utmost speed of our oars from the glare of the smouldering ship and the body of her captain.

CHAPTER XII

DANGEROUS PARTNERS

It was somewhat after midnight when we finally landed, both boats close together, on a shelving shore that rose rapidly into hills. We had little idea where it was, but reckoned that it should be about a hundred miles south of Portland.

Our men intended to turn northward, keeping to the boats till they should come in sight of some port. For myself, I proposed to strike inland alone; the company of my late shipmates filled me with horror, and I was desperately impatient to be rid of any reminder of the *Oregonian* as soon as possible.

"I've figured it all out," said Conover to me, before we separated. "We'll report that the brig took fire in her hold when we were three or four days out. We put back, tried to make port again; the skipper and the mate

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lost their lives on board, and finally we had to take to the boats—what were left of us.”

And that is the story which the world knows of the loss of the *Oregonian*, which, I need hardly say, is not the real name of the luckless brig.

Two days later I was in Sacramento, having struck a stage line after six hours' walking, that carried me to the railway. My first care on reaching the city was to get my gold together from its various concealed packets, and take it to the bank. There was less than I had expected; some of it had evidently been lost in the scramble of leaving the ship, but when I cashed it I received a packet of forty twenty-dollar bills, and besides this I still had two hundred dollars that was left from Crawford's fortunate mistake in the Vermilion mine office. Altogether, a round thousand dollars.

But this would never be enough to hire a fast steamer or even a schooner, engage a crew and outfit an expedition to recover the treasure-laden berg. It would require three or

four times as much, and the problem was how the sum was to be raised.

Then I recollected the Spanish girl of Vermilion, and it occurred to me that she might be disposed to furnish the two or three thousand dollars more that we needed, and take a stake in the enterprise. There was no danger of loss; the Blackfoot Mine was rich enough to lend that amount, and the girl, I knew, had the true adventurer's spirit that would welcome such a speculation. In spite of the chill fear, mingled with fascination, that the *señorita's* memory brought me I resolved to appeal to her.

It was then early in the evening, and I found that there was no train for Vermilion till eight o'clock the next morning. I still had the night to think the matter over in, and also to make up my arrears of sleep. So I dined early and went to bed at nine o'clock, leaving orders at the hotel desk to call me at seven.

But I found that I could not sleep, after all. My brain was charged with too much

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excitement and tragedy, too much anticipation and too much fear. I tried to keep the thought of the *Oregonian* out of my mind; I wondered what Pill was doing, whether he was still afloat, or whether the crash had come already, bringing to light the thing we had tried so desperately to keep in the dark. I speculated over this till I dozed, and almost instantly found myself sitting up in bed with the picture of the blazing *Oregonian* in my eyes, and the scream of the captain in my ears, and my mind reeled off dizzily the scenes of murder and combat and riot that had kept my nerves on strain for the past week. Terror and remorse haunted me; the skipper's curse hung over my pillow. It was useless to try to sleep, and finally I got up, dressed, and went out to walk. It was then past eleven o'clock.

The streets were almost deserted, silent under the blare of the arc lights and cool with the air of the mountains. It was pleasant to feel the nearness of friendly humanity once more, and I strolled on and on, gradually los-

ing my eagerness and bitterness alike, and soothed into more peace than I had known since that day—how distant it seemed!—when I rode into Vermilion.

I had paid very little attention to where I was going, and was only recalled to myself by hearing a tower clock strike one. Then I realised that I knew nothing of the geography of the city, and that it was too late for a man to saunter about alone with a thousand dollars in his pocket.

I had got out of the business district where my hotel was situated, and I found myself in a residential street, lined with brick houses that somehow looked as if they had outlived their respectability. All was quiet, however; not a light showed at any window; no foot but my own sounded on the street. From somewhere in the distance came the sudden roar of a trolley car, and I turned to walk in that direction, feeling surreptitiously for the pistol in my hip pocket—the revolver of the *Oregonian's* dead captain.

I was walking fast and alertly now, when

the sudden crash of a gun-shot checked me sharply. It had been fired in one of the houses I had just passed, and apparently just inside the door. As I hesitated, listening and startled, a woman screamed, another shot exploded, and the door burst open. A woman ran out and fled toward me, with a tall man at her heels.

The street was shaded by trees, darkening the sidewalk, and I stepped instantly into the deepest shadow. The pair almost brushed me as they dashed past, and I saw that the woman clutched a smoking revolver. The affair was none of my business, but as the man went by me I hit him on the jaw with all my strength. The blow went home with a crash that frightened me, and he dropped heavily on his back and lay without moving.

At the sound the woman stopped, glanced back, then wheeled and aimed again at the man's prostrate body. She could hardly have missed this time; the muzzle was hardly six feet from his head, but I jerked her wrist aside before she could pull the trigger.

She turned on me with the ferocity of a wild-cat, and a white shaft of electric light fell through the leaves upon her face—great, velvet-dark eyes, brimming with tears of rage, and a face that no man could forget. I had certainly not forgotten it, and I glanced quickly then at the unconscious man and caught a glimmer of red hair and moustache through the gloom.

I caught her by the arm without ceremony and dragged her back.

“Come, we must get away from here at once, Miss Ranon!” I exclaimed. “The police’ll be here in a minute.”

For I had heard two or three windows being raised, and I saw several men in the distance, attracted by the shots and running toward us.

She gazed up at me, startled and resisting at first, and then uttered a cry of astonishment.

“It’s you! It’s the man from Vermilion. Santa Maria, what luck! Let me finish him while I have the chance!”

I shook my head and took the gun from her by force.

"Not to-night. I've more important business on hand than killing our old friend Dolan. And I certainly don't want to have to furnish explanations to a crowd—nor to the police. Come along."

I hurried her down one street and up another, doubling and zig-zagging till I thought we were safe from pursuit.

"Now we can go more slowly. I'll see you home," I said. "Where are you staying?"

"I'm not staying anywhere," replied the *señorita*, who was out of breath, but had recovered her temper. "But I'll go to the Pacific Hotel. They know me there, and I think they'll take me in, even if it is after midnight. You're wondering, of course, why I'm here at this hour. I wonder what you think of me. Listen,—that scoundrel Dolan——"

"Don't tell me. I don't think anything at all," I interrupted. But in fact I did think a great deal. I was sickened, angry, astonished,

and astonished at myself for being so. Her presence with the Irishman in that house and at that hour could bear only one interpretation, and I had no desire to hear her excuse herself.

"But I insist on telling you!" she urged. "I must. I won't have you suspect me of something—something unspeakable. My father has been here and in San Francisco ever since you left Vermilion, and yesterday I got a telegram from him telling me to meet him here—at that house. I understood that it was a boarding-house. I came, of course. But my father never sent that telegram. I found nobody in the house but a couple of Chinese servants, who pretended to understand no English. When I tried to get out, after waiting an hour the doors were locked. I had to stay. About midnight Dolan came, and—well, luckily I had my revolver."

"But what did Dolan want? What was his object?"

"Why, don't you see? He simply wanted to compromise me—to force me into marrying

him. He has been afraid that I would slip out of it after all, and he wanted to shut off any escape."

I did not know whether to believe this story or not. It sounded improbable, but all the *señorita's* doings were unusual. At any rate, I was obliged to appear to accept it.

"I thought you would have broken finally with Dolan by this time. Why on earth do you put up with him at all?" I remarked.

Miss Ranon pondered for some minutes as we walked.

"It's a secret——" she began.

"Then I beg your pardon. Don't say any more."

"—a secret which I am going to tell you," she finished calmly. "I am going to tell you because I like you, and because I think you may be able to help me. You seem to me rather square, somehow. I'd trust you before most of the men I know—and I'm going to. But not now, of course," she went on. "Two o'clock in the morning isn't the time for con-

fidences. Come to the Pacific Hotel to-morrow—no, this morning at eleven o'clock."

"Curiously, I think I need your help too." I said. "Do you know, I was going to start for Vermilion in the morning to see you. I've a queer story to tell you. I'll explain later."

"Of course you shall have every help I can give. We always seem to be giving mutual aid, don't we—even if this is only the second time we've met. Where have you been?"

"Mining," I said. "Here's your hotel. Perhaps I'd better——"

"Yes, you'd better. It'll look considerably more respectable if I come in alone, considering the hour. *Adios, Señor.*"

"*Buenas noches, Señorita,*" I answered, and left her to go on alone. But I hung about till I was sure that she was not going to be turned away, and it was nearly at the end of the darkness when I at last returned to my own hotel. Here I smoked and reflected till breakfast, for it was clear that this was a night fated to be sleepless.

I must have dozed a little in my chair, how-

ever, for the breakfast bell roused me sharply from a sort of dream. The hot coffee and the food revived me wonderfully, and after breakfast it seemed to me that matters were sufficiently advanced to communicate with Pill. I accordingly sent him the following telegram:

"Got money in sight. Meet me in two days at Templeton Hotel, San Francisco.
"DICK."

For I had no intention of staying in Sacramento an hour longer than was necessary to complete my business arrangements with Miss Ranon, and I lounged about impatiently, trying to kill time, till I could meet her according to the appointment she had set. When the hour arrived, however, I felt a certain belated reluctance to put my request to her, a shrinking from the sight of her. I never entered the *señorita's* presence without a certain trepidation, as if she had been some beautiful and dangerous animal, and perhaps she was. But I had no reason to anticipate any

danger to myself; I even had a feeling that her friendship would be as loyal as her hate was unscrupulous.

Yet I felt the same thrill of insecurity when I went into the dainty sitting-room of the Pacific Hotel, where she was awaiting me. She was in morning gown, all soft pinks and whites. The sleeves fell back from her rounded arms as she lounged in an easy-chair, and there was a strange glow in her eyes as she looked up to greet me, but she did not smile nor speak.

"They let you have a room, all right, I see," I began.

She continued to regard me for another moment without saying anything.

"Now tell me, first of all, what you have been doing, and especially how I can help you," she said, softly.

So I told her my whole story—my escape from Vermilion, the wreck, the iceberg, the treasure, the rescue and the mutiny. I kept nothing back, and as a sort of corroboration, I showed her a couple of nuggets that I had

reserved, intending them as a gift for Jessie.

"So you see," I concluded, "that berg is melting faster every day, and we want to get back to it as quick as possible. We haven't money enough to hire or buy any kind of ship. Can you lend it to us? Do you want to buy a share in the thing? I propose it as a matter of pure business. There isn't any risk of loss, and the profits may be millions."

The girl had watched me closely as she listened, and a new expression had come into her face. I was horribly conscious of the improbable sound of the tale as I told it.

"How can you ever find the iceberg again?" was her first question.

"There should be no difficulty about that. By the *Oregonian's* log-book, she was five hundred and eighty miles west-northwest of Vancouver at noon of the day they picked me up. By calculating rate and direction of the drift in that part of the ocean we can easily find out approximately where it will be in, say, two weeks. But when it strikes the warm Japan current it will dissolve very fast."

"I'm afraid I can't help you. How much money would it take?" she said, after reflecting a little.

"Perhaps three or four thousand dollars. It's hard to say," I replied, terribly mortified and disappointed.

"And how much do you think you should realise, if you were successful?"

"That is still harder to say. Judging from my own results, I might guess as high as half a million."

"Quite enough for four shares," she said, briskly. "You and I, your partner and Dolan. It'll be easy to get the money. We'll go to Dolan."

"To Dolan!" I ejaculated, stupefied.

"Certainly, to Dolan. I'll use him for my purposes while I need him. He'll take my word that the thing is on the square, and in fact he'd put up four thousand dollars if I asked him, even if he knew that it wasn't."

"After last night? He'll surely——"

"He could hardly have recognised you before you struck him. As for me, he won't

bear me any grudge. I know him," said this strange woman, with composure.

"But can we trust him?"

"No, but we'll watch him."

"I don't like it," I objected, bluntly. "I have no desire whatever to make Mr. Dolan's fortune. I give you my word that it's on the square, and why can't you or your father put up the necessary capital? Pardon my plainness. But surely the big Blackfoot Mine can——"

"My poor boy, you are under a delusion. The Blackfoot Mine doesn't belong to us."

"What do you mean?" I queried, puzzled. "Whose is it, then?"

"Oh, it's generally supposed to be ours. We thought we owned it, up to a couple of years ago. You know, my father bought it in an undeveloped state, worked it, made it pay, and then leased it to a company, to give himself time to collect old Bibles. Well, it seems that there was a flaw in the title; or, rather, that the man who sold it had no particular title at all. My father never was a business

man; it isn't the only time he's been cheated. Anyhow, it appears that the Blackfoot really belongs to a wretched poor Mexican, whose name I won't mention, who lives at Vermilion, and never works because we supply him with enough to eat and almost enough to drink. He has no suspicion of what he owns, you may be sure. He wouldn't be half so happy if he had."

"But where does Dolan come in?"

"In this way. Dolan was a cheap lawyer in Sacramento, and he discovered these facts in going through some old State records. He worked the case up, got all the evidence and papers into his own hands, and then came up to see my father. Since then, Dolan has been the real owner of the mine. He is the company who leases it from us, at a nominal rental, and we are obliged to renew the lease annually. He supplies us with what money we need, just as we supply the Mexican. But we could no more raise a thousand dollars without his consent than we could raid the 'Frisco Mint."

"In short, he blackmails you," I commented.

"Precisely. Then, for personal reasons, I suppose, and possible for financial ones, he wants to marry me. My father sides with him, for reasons that I can understand very well; as a son-in-law his silence could be counted on. I suppose that filial duty and self-preservation combined ought to make me submit, but they don't. So I compromise; I wear his ring, and I put off the ceremony, but I can't keep this up much longer."

Words of the warmest sympathy and pity rose to my lips, for her superficial lightness did not conceal the bitter intensity of feeling beneath. No man—not I, at any rate, can look on the trouble of a beautiful woman without emotions of anger, grief and desires to console that approach the danger line.

"I shouldn't think Dolan would care to keep it up, if you're in the habit of peeping at him with a pistol," I said, speaking lightly to conceal my depth of feeling.

"Do you dare to blame me?" she flared.

"You—with the blood of half a dozen men on your hands, shed for the sake of your wretched money? Is it for you to despise me because I am desperate enough to stick at nothing to defend my honour—yes, and my life. What would you have me do, then? My father cannot protect me; he is against me. I have no brothers, no one."

"You have friends," I said, deeply troubled. "Count on me. You said you needed my help."

"Do you mean that?" she asked. "Then we can face Dolan together."

CHAPTER XIII

OLD FRIENDS

HALF an hour after this we went out together and took a car for the business centre of the city, where Dolan had his headquarters. Presently Miss Ranon directed my attention to a great black and gold sign at the entrance of a splendid granite office-building.

"The Sacramento Mining and Development Co.," it read, and underneath, in smaller letters, "The Blackfoot Mine."

"The 'Company,'—that's Dolan," said Ines. "His office is up here on the fourth floor, and also his political headquarters."

"What, is he in politics, too?"

"Ward politics," she replied contemptuously, and we went up in the elevator.

But there was nothing contemptible about the aspect of Dolan's office. We entered a great anteroom, panelled with redwood, furnished with oak and heavily carpeted. Round the walls ran an upholstered bench, and these

seats were almost filled by as mixed a collection of men as I ever saw. There were well-dressed business men, silk-hatted, flashy individuals bearing the stamp of the "sport," unshaven and brutal specimens of the city thug, and the ignobly cunning faces of the ward heelers. All these men were waiting to see Dolan, and the spectacle gave me material for thought.

Close to an inner door was a secretary's desk, and we approached it to send in our names. But at that moment the door opened, and three over-dressed men, of the low politician type, came out with loud talk and laughter, and I caught sight of Dolan's red countenance behind them.

He detected us at the same moment, and as his eye lighted upon Miss Ranon I saw his face turn absolutely livid for a second. He beckoned her into the inner office, and eyed me with acute suspicion as I followed.

"This is Mr. Shields, whom you've met before," observed Ines.

I am sure that he had already recognised

me, but there never was a man with such control over his expression as Dolan.

"Gad, if it isn't my long-lost brother from Vermilion!" he exclaimed, heartily. "You always do fall on your feet, as I've remarked before. How did you run across Miss Ranon?"

There was a purple bruise on the side of his jaw, but he evidently was far from connecting it with me, and I had no desire to enlighten him.

"The less said about *that* the better," Miss Ranon remarked, coolly. "I might ask you how you came by that mark on your chin, and you'd be troubled to answer me, wouldn't you? Mr. Shields and I have a business proposition to put before you."

She walked to a mirror, tilted her hat a little, patted her hair a couple of times, and then sat down in Dolan's own revolving chair at his desk. She put her elbows on the scattered papers and composedly surveyed us both as we stood before her.

"Tell him about it," she ordered me.

So I rehearsed again the story of my adventures since leaving Vermilion—of the wreck, the iceberg and the frozen gold-mine. Only I said nothing of the mutiny nor of the *Oregonian*, simply stating that I had been picked up by an American ship and landed at Portland. It was the second time I had told the story, and I thought I contrived to make it sound more plausible. I was improving with practice.

"I guarantee the story," said the *señorita*. "We want you to put up, say four thousand dollars, to grub-stake an expedition to find that iceberg again. If we find it, as we surely will, there will be probably half a million dollars to divide among four of us, for Mr. Shields tells me that he has a partner already."

"Sure, that's good enough," replied the Irishman, looking with a dubious smile from one of us to the other. "Only, where is this iceberg of yours, Mr. Shields?"

"Well, of course that's my secret at present. I'll steer you to it," I told him.

Dolan meditated, and exchanged a long look with Miss Ranon.

"Four thousand dollars isn't such a great deal of money," he remarked. "Still I'd hate to lose it."

"There's not much danger of loss, if we act quickly," I said. "Here are some nuggets that I brought from the berg. You can telegraph to Seattle if you like, and you'll find that I was one of the passengers on the *Bolivia*, that sailed three weeks ago and was never heard from again."

Dolan examined the nuggets with interest, but still seemed to hesitate. I think indeed that he was afraid to commit himself, one way or the other, probably connecting this proposal in some way with the scene of the previous night. No doubt he believed that a trap was somehow being laid for him; for if the man's soul were capable of fear, he must have feared when he saw the *señorita* at his office door.

"Look here, I'll think it over and let you know," he said at last. "What's your address?"

"I'm going to San Francisco this afternoon," I replied. "Wire me at the Temple-

ton Hotel. And remember that every day means a loss of thousands."

"You'd better wice to me," interposed Ines. "I'm going to San Francisco in a couple of days, and I'll be at the Plaza Hotel."

Dolan turned a suddenly savage glance upon me, and it dawned upon me that he was really in love, in the deadliest of earnest, with this woman, and furiously jealous of my association with her. And in fact her announced trip to San Francisco was as much of a shock to me as it was to him.

Three hours later I was aboard the train for the coast, with my brain feverish with the renewed prospect of the gold hunt. For after leaving Dolan, Ines had assured me that he would lend himself to our plans, that she could bring him round if he proved reluctant; and I felt certain that she could.

While I waited for Pill to present himself in answer to my message, I did not fail to improve the leisure moments to study the problem of ocean currents and winds that was to

be of so much importance to us, and after making my own calculations I submitted them to the Bureau of Oceanography. It was a week before I received the report of this expert investigation, but when I did get it, it corroborated my estimate closely enough to make it practically certain that the present position of the iceberg could be fixed with exactitude.

Meanwhile I met most of the trains from Goldendale, and on the second day at noon I espied Pill making his way through the crowd that poured from the gates, and it was with a violent shock that I recognised Jessie at his shoulder. I gripped Pill's hand, and then inconsiderately threw my arms round Jessie and kissed her twice.

"Hello, there! I didn't know that you two were on such terms!" cried Pill, hugely astonished.

"Then it's a good time to congratulate me. Your sister has promised——"

"Oh, Dick!" murmured Jessie, in a painful state of crimson.

"After the tide turns in our affairs, you know."

"Is that really so? Then, congratulations, for sure! But, say, the tide *has* turned, from your wire. What did it mean? I've been on the rack with impatience to hear. You haven't been to Alaska? How did you strike it rich so soon? Is it a mine?"

"Wait till we get to the hotel," I replied.

Pill was looking worn. The strain of the last month had evidently told heavily. He was too impatient to hear my news to talk of anything else, but he said that there were no new developments at Goldendale—with a warning side glance toward his sister. Business was going on much as usual. Jessie walked between us, demurely shy and silent, but looking happy.

In my room at the Templeton Hotel I told the story of the iceberg once more, and of the strange alliance I had made for its recovery.

"It's the queerest tale I ever heard," said Pill when I had finished. "But of course I know you're not lying——"

"Thank you!"

"And I don't see how you could have been mistaken. This is gold, all right," fingering the specimens I had produced. "Do you think your Irishman will really grub-stake us?"

"Miss Ranon thinks she can persuade him, and she ought to have a great deal of influence there. We should hear from him to-day or to-morrow."

"Well, if he won't, we'll raise the cash some other way, and there'll be all the more profit for us. We must begin to look round for a ship at once—a small steamer if possible, or else an island schooner, if we can't manage anything better. Not a minute to be lost. You say the ice is melting fast?"

As Pill and I passed through the office the clerk gave me a telegram. It was from Sacramento, and it read:

"Will be at Plaza Hotel to-morrow noon
Come. I. R."

CHAPTER XIV

OUTWITTED

PILL and I searched all that afternoon along the harbour front and in the shipping-offices and the offices of the brokers of marine "real estate," but we could find nothing of the sort of craft we needed. There were schooners, of course, but the only steamer available was an unwieldy freighter, for which an exorbitant price was demanded. We finally gave up the search for the day and went back to our hotel.

Jessie left San Francisco that night, and the next morning Pill and I resumed our search for a vessel as soon as business had begun in shipping circles. We were beginning to think that we should have to hire a schooner, or try some other port, when a streak of luck crossed our way at last. We heard of the *Chrysalis*, were told that she might be for

hire, and tracked her down to her agent's office.

The *Chrysalis* was an ocean-going steamer, built and fitted as a yacht by a now bankrupt and long-forgotten millionaire. She was capable of making fifteen knots an hour, and of crossing the Pacific if necessary. She had been laid up since winter, but we were assured that she was in perfect trim and needed only to coal. She would cost us four hundred dollars a month, and we would have to insure her and find everything. But I did not anticipate that the voyage would last longer than two months at the most.

We did not have the money with us to close the deal, and we did not yet know whether Dolan was going to advance the funds, but Miss Ranon no doubt brought this information with her. By the time we had looked over the yacht it was almost noon, and I started for the Plaza Hotel to see what the Irishman intended to do.

The *señorita* hurried bewitchingly to meet me when I entered her sitting-room.

"Dolan has given me credit with his bankers here to the extent of four thousand dollars," she exclaimed. "I'll handle the money and pay the bills. Dolan and I will both sail with the expedition, and he'll be here in a day or two. Have you got a ship in view?"

"Yes, just what we want," I replied, overjoyed. "Steam yacht, six hundred tons, costing four hundred dollars a month. We have to coal her, buy supplies, mining apparatus and so forth, and hire a captain and crew. I fancy there won't be much left of Dolan's four thousand, even with my one thousand added."

"Perhaps he'd stand for a little more if necessary. We'll go out now, and you can take me to see the ship."

From that moment the *señorita* was all business, alert, frank and masculine. On our way to the wharf we called for Pill at the hotel and I presented him to Miss Ranon. He had trouble in concealing his admiration to a reasonable degree, and he whispered to me at the first opportunity:

"Gad, ain't she a stunner?"

We engaged the *Chrysalis*, Miss Ranon paying the necessary deposit, and we ordered her to be coaled as quickly as possible. We engaged a skipper also, a middle-aged New Englander named Hart, who was out of a berth and glad to take a temporary job to fill in time. He was highly recommended; his hard, dry face struck me as honest, and we had reason afterwards to be glad that my instinct was correct.

He was able to help us to a crew of eight men and a couple of engineers, and we had them aboard the yacht the same day to superintend the coaling. Meanwhile Pill and I scoured the city, ordering supplies, tools, weapons, arranging for insurance, installing a great safe aboard, testing compasses and machinery, till our heads reeled with the multiplicity of matters, and we went nightly to our beds in a state of utter exhaustion. It is no small task to outfit for even a short cruise, we learned, and the first three thousand dollars went like melting snow. Most of the large bills were paid by that time, however, and the

four thousand dollars seemed likely to be enough; in any event, we had my own thousand dollars to draw on, which as yet remained almost intact.

Dolan came down twice that week from Sacramento, looked over the yacht, inspected the bills, and was introduced to the captain as our partner. He appeared even more ironically amicable than usual during the few hours he spent with us; and on the second visit he said that he would not be able to come again till the eve of sailing.

Meanwhile I found time for repeating my calculations as to the drift of the berg, and we decided that it should then have reached a point about four hundred miles off the coast and in a direction north-west by west from Seattle. We should reach it in four or five days from San Francisco, and luckily it was a large enough object to be seen from afar.

In spite of our utmost efforts it seemed impossible to get off in less than three days more. Pill and I worked double tides; the *señorita* ably seconded us, till, on the afternoon of the

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next day, a telegram came on board the yacht for me, having been forwarded from the hotel. It was from Goldendale, and read:

"Miss Gordon badly hurt. Tell her brother and both come at once.

"SPRAGUE, M. D."

I glanced at my watch and rushed to find Pill, who was below.

"There's no Dr. Sprague at Goldendale, so far as I know," he said, after glancing at the message. "Seems to me a new doctor has just come there, though," he added.

"There'll be a train leaving in half an hour," I broke in. "We'd better try to catch it."

We started for the hotel, where we clutched a few things and raced for the station. Fortunately it was not very far away, and we caught the train as it was pulling out.

That was a nightmare journey. The train was a slow one, stopping at every insignificant station. We might as well have waited for the express leaving four hours later, but

we were not in a condition to bear waiting. It was hard enough to bear those hours of travel, first through the deepening twilight and then through pitchy darkness, full of horrible possibilities as the train banged and rattled over the mountain roadway.

Neither of us spoke much. We sat in the smoking-car and consumed a great many cigars, consulting our watches every quarter of an hour. The train was late; I remembered that this train was always late, and it was almost midnight when we reached Goldendale.

There were half a dozen people at the station, all familiar faces, but none of them appeared to be there to meet us. We spoke to no one, but jumped into a hack and were driven as fast as possible to Pill's house.

The place was totally dark. We stopped, hesitating, at the gate. I had expected to find the house lighted and awake.

"They must have taken her away," Pill muttered; but there was no hospital in the town, and his words had an ominous sound.

Finally he knocked, at first timorously, and then more loudly.

Almost immediately a light sprang out in one of the upper windows; there was a long interval, and then I heard faint steps coming down the stairs, and the light shone through the key-hole. The lock clicked back; my flesh fairly crawled with dread—and the door was opened by Jessie, in her dressing-gown, holding a lamp.

The simultaneous exclamation that we all three uttered was blended together.

"Oh, Pill!" she cried, almost dropping the lamp. "Is anything wrong?"

"Are you all right, Jess? Have you been hurt, or sick?" demanded her brother.

"Why, no. What did you——"

"What's the meaning of this telegram, then?" and Pill pulled the crumpled yellow paper from his pocket.

"Why, I haven't been hurt, and there isn't any doctor named Sprague in town. You surely don't think that I sent it?"

"Let's go inside," said Pill. "No, cer-

tainly not, Jess. The question is, who did send it."

"Maybe there's another Miss Gordon here," I suggested, and we grasped at this so very probable explanation.

"Well, there's nothing to do now but wait till morning," said Pill. "You'd better go back to bed, Jess. We'll find out later who sent the message, and if it's a joke."

Jessie slipped away, and we heard her busied for some time in the up-stairs regions, preparing rooms for us. Presently he came in again with hot coffee, cold meat and bread and butter, which was most welcome to us, for we had had nothing to eat since noon. But we did not go to bed for a couple of hours. The reaction from our nervous excitement was still too strong, and I felt somehow the presence of treachery in the air. Yet I could not see just how we could be injured by our journey. The *Chrysalis* was not nearly ready to sail, and our absence for half a day would not appreciably delay matters.

Next morning we went first of all to the

telegraph office, where we learned that no such message as the one we had received had been filed at Goldendale. This put a new face on the matter. If it had not been sent from Goldendale it must have been forged in San Francisco—that is, it was not a genuine telegram at all. Pill and I looked at each other in some alarm. There was a local train for San Francisco at nine o'clock, and a through one at noon, which would place us there almost as soon.

"All the same," said Pill, "I don't see how we can really miss anything of any account. I really ought to stay here for a couple of hours, for I left things in any old sort of shape when I rushed off to meet you, and there are one or two matters that I absolutely must look after."

"We'll not lose any time, anyhow, if we wait for the express at twelve o'clock," I agreed; and while we were talking on the depot platform the nine o'clock train arrived and we foolishly let it go.

We spent the morning at the *Bonanza* of

fice, which was in charge of our head compositor as temporary editor. I must confess that the copy of the paper he had got out since Pill's departure seemed in no way worse than the regular issues.

Pill emerged from a prolonged study of the books with the bad temper that the operation always gave him, and we went home for an early lunch at eleven o'clock. At a quarter to twelve we were at the station, and learned that the noon express had been cancelled for a week past. The next train for San Francisco did not leave till seven o'clock. We had relied on our memory, instead of consulting the timetables afresh.

Then I did indeed have a terrible foreboding of catastrophe.

"I felt as if we were doing wrong to let that first train go," said Pill in dismay. "Now we can't get back to the city till the latter part of the night, and God knows what's happening."

"I don't see that anything very important

can happen," I replied to cheer him, though I felt little cheerfulness myself.

The train was a slow one, and would take at least eight hours to make the journey. And it turned out to be late as well; it left Golden-dale at half-past eight instead of at seven, and it was after six o'clock when we reached San Francisco next morning. It was foggy, dark, and raining a little.

A street-car from the station took us straight to the docks. We walked fifty yards further, and turned through the familiar gate.

The slip where the yacht had been berthed was empty. Men were at work cleaning up the wharf.

"Where's the *Chrysalis*?" Pill demanded breathlessly from one of these labourers.

"Sailed last night," replied the man, without looking up.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST STAKE

"WHAT?" roared Pill, in a terrible voice of rage, despair and incredulity.

"Sailed last night. Don't you know what that means? Gone to sea," repeated the fellow, ill-temperedly.

I glanced about, half dazed. My eye fell upon a man I knew, whom we had employed on various jobs about the yacht.

"What's all this, Wilson?" I cried. "The yacht hasn't sailed without us, has she?"

"She's sailed, sure enough, sir," replied the man. "Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Everything's wrong, by Heaven!" yelled Pill. "How did she get off? Why, she didn't have her coal in her."

"Coaled yesterday, sir. They sure did hustle. Never saw a ship take her coal so quick, barring a warship, of course. Sailed

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about two o'clock this morning, they tell me."

"By thunder, that girl has done us!" Pill raged. "She and that Irishman have got clean away without us!"

"Did you see her sail? Did you see a lady come aboard?" I asked.

By this time quite a crowd had collected around us, but there was no one there who had been upon the wharf when the *Chrysalis* put to sea. We called a cab, drove madly to the Plaza Hotel and inquired for Miss Ranon. She had departed the evening before, leaving no address.

From the hotel we flew back to the wharf again. No one there knew anything beyond the fact that the yacht had put to sea. We could find no one about the place who had seen her sailing. There was only the certainty that she must at that moment be a hundred miles or so out to sea, headed for the floating fortune.

But Pill's face lighted up suddenly.

"Why, they can't do very much, after all. They don't know where to look for the berg."

"Yes, they do. I told Miss Ranon—if she remembered it," I groaned.

"You stupendous ass!" Pill managed to get out, and choked.

We dismissed our cab and walked hopelessly back toward the Templeton Hotel, where we still had our rooms. The game was lost, then, and this time beyond any chance of recovery. We had not money enough to hire any craft that would have the ghost of a chance of overtaking the *Chrysalis*, and there was no time to look for more capital and fit out another expedition. In a fortnight Dolan would have cleaned out the berg.

"Pill," I said, "say something. Curse me—kick me, won't you? I'm the rottenest partner that any man was ever cursed with!"

Pill looked at me, and his haggard face softened.

"Never mind, old boy. You did your best to get us out of our scrape, and you nearly pulled it off. We'll pull through somehow."

My heart sickened at the dreary prospect.

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A day ago and we had been prospective millionaires, and now we were canvassing expedients for keeping out of prison. I searched wildly about for some means of retrieving our position, and found none. At that moment there was no risk that I would not have taken, no chance, however desperate, that I would not have welcomed. But there was not even a chance.

At the hotel the clerk gave me a letter which had arrived the day before. I did not recognise the stiff handwriting of the address, but it turned out to be from our New England skipper Hart, who wrote:

"Your partner, Mr. Dolan, came aboard this morning with your letter of orders. Sorry you can't sail with us, but we will go to sea to-night, according to instructions. Your partner is a driver, for sure. He's put thirty extra men on to get the stuff into her. Hope everything is all right."

The last sentence seemed to indicate a possible doubt. I handed the letter to Pill.

"A letter of orders?" he exclaimed, astonished.

"Forged, of course," said I. "It was easy to do, since I suppose Hart had never seen my handwriting."

"And a forged telegram to take us to Goldendale. Forgery seems to be Dolan's specialty."

"The whole thing is clear enough now," said I. "We've been allowed the privilege of getting Dolan's ship ready for him, and now he sails away for the plunder—for our gold mine."

Pill's face turned a dark red.

"Dick," he said, with deadly deliberation, "we'll just watch for these friends of ours when they come back. We'll lay for them, and if they land anywhere on this Pacific coast I'll have that fellow's life."

My own blood leaped with responsive passion at the idea of vengeance, of brute force after all this tangle of deceit, of a hand-to-hand struggle with knife and pistol on the deck of the yacht. We might lose the money,

but the time would come when I would hold Dolan at the muzzle of my revolver—and little mercy I would show him!

But all this was fancy, and the present was real. Our effervescence of impotent rage passed away, and we fell gradually into dull depression again. Nothing was left but the sickening reality of helplessness and defeat.

We sat down in the hotel smoking-room and smoked, looked out of the windows, and hardly spoke. I picked up one newspaper after another from the tables and glanced at them mechanically. They were full of the sensation of the Chicago wheat corner. At the time I hardly knew what I read, but the staring headlines photographed themselves on my memory. I can see them now, and the feeling of utter weariness and despair of that hour still comes with the memory:

“July Wheat Still Soaring—Market Closed
Yesterday at \$1.78—Bear Failures
Reported.”

The now historical attempt of the daring

Minneapolis miller to corner the wheat market was the only subject that day, but I glanced down the exciting newspaper columns without caring to understand them.

But, as I looked over sheet after sheet, my eye at last caught something that vaguely interested me. I read it, at first with half my attention, and then a light—the wildest flicker of imagination—rose upon me, and I re-read it with my whole mind. Then I handed the paper to Pill.

The article which had seized upon my attention occupied a column or more with two crude cuts. It was the report of the successful trial flight of an airship, a motor-driven, steerable balloon of the Zeppelin pattern. The flight had been made a few days before, near Seattle, and it was a Seattle paper which I had been reading. The aeronaut, Frederic Dumoines, was a Frenchman naturalised in the United States, and he claimed to be able to maintain a speed of thirty miles an hour for five hundred miles in fair weather. In the trial he had actually remained aloft for

eight hours, and had gone a hundred miles out to sea.

It was this last point that had fascinated me, but Pill read the story with no sign of interest.

"Well, what about it?" he said, listlessly.

"Why, don't you see what we could do if we had that machine? The paper says it's capable of making thirty miles an hour in a calm and sixty with a fair wind, and of keeping it up for nearly twenty-four hours. It isn't as far as that to——"

"By Jove, we can beat the *Chrysalis* by a week!" Pill exclaimed. "But what's the use? Likely the story is a fake, and anyhow we can't run airships, and the balloon man wouldn't take the risk."

"Men will take a lot of risk for a chance at half a million, and that's what it amounts to. Would you risk it yourself?"

"Like a shot. But——"

"Well, we'll try to make that man see it in the same way as we do. A balloonist must surely be an adventurous sort of fellow nat-

urally. How much money have we got left?"

I extracted my package of bills from my inside pocket and ran over them. There were eight hundred and sixty dollars.

"We'll offer him three hundred dollars down for the hire of his balloon, and we'll give him a third share in the iceberg. If he won't take three hundred we'll raise it, of course; but he's not likely to haggle over a few dollars if he's inclined to go into the thing at all."

"But it's such a deuced incredible story to tell him," Pill objected.

"Of course it is, and we won't tell it. We'll give him a more plausible tale for his own good. Then whatever money we have left we will send to your sister. If we find the berg we won't need it."

"And if we don't find it?"

"We'll never come back, of course. It's the last stake we have to play. Are you game to put up your life?"

We gazed straight into one another's eyes,

tingling with the excitement that comes of desperation, and we shook hands on it.

We left for Seattle that very evening, and of all the dauntless errands on which the goose chase had sent us, I think this was the maddest. For we had to approach a total stranger, and induce him to risk his life, to say nothing of his valuable balloon, on a chance that was admittedly a desperate one, even supposing that our preposterous-sounding tale were true. At the time I did not realise these difficulties; I think we must both have been scarcely sane; and the fact that we did succeed shows the weight that sheer desperation carried with it.

At ten o'clock the next morning we were inquiring for Mr. Dumoin at the hotel where the papers told us that he was staying. Fortunately he was in, and he received us in his room.

We found the aeronaut a small, dark man, with a waxed black moustache thrust sharp points upward, he had an alert manner, and as I was pleased to observe,

a reckless eye. A reckless character was what we had to look for in him.

We've seen the newspaper accounts of your airship, Mr. Dumoines," Pill began. "We're interested in aerial navigation, and—
—point is this, will you risk your
—a stake of a thousand dol
lars.

—it's over a week for a good
deduction. —gave all in fact,"
he insisted, —a stake.

—your airship to make a
—it'll say four hundred miles,
—?"

"—only, if the wind was not ag

—sea."

Dumoines stated.

"Will you explain. This is the state of
—imposed. "A few weeks ago I
—a very rich gold mine on an island
—about four hundred miles north
—I came down to San Francisco to
—for working it, and took in a

partner. This partner has given me the slip and has just sailed in a fast yacht for the island. If he gets there first, it's all up with the mine. If you can put us there before him, we will give you a third share. It may be worth anywhere up to a million dollars.

"Further," I went on, "here is four hundred dollars," and I slapped down a package of bills on the table before me. It's every cent we can raise in the world between us. You can take it for expenses, and we'll stake our lives on the trip besides."

My voice sounded strange in my own ears, and, glancing at Pill, I saw an expression of desperate and haggard earnestness on his face that startled me. I suppose I must have looked like that too, and probably our faces were the strongest arguments for our sincerity.

"Well," said Dumoines, "I can't deny that a gold mine would be very useful to me just now. I'm trying to get my machine adopted by the United States War Department. But, excuse me, gentlemen—your story is an un-

usual one, you know, and have you any proof of what you say?"

"Only this," I said, producing the two or three nuggets that I still kept by me. "It's placer gold. I washed out over five thousand dollars' worth all alone in five days, with nothing but a dinky little tin basin. Plenty of water handy and no land near—no other land, that is," I hastily corrected myself.

"But what would we live on? We couldn't carry provisions enough."

"I left food enough hidden on the island to last us a month."

"But then, supposing everything went just as you anticipated, how would we ever get back? We couldn't inflate the balloon on the island, I suppose."

"Getting back will be simple enough. The yacht will be along in a week with my partner, and we must capture it."

"What, piracy too?" exclaimed the Frenchman.

The word gave me a cold shudder down the spine.

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort. It's our yacht and the captain will side with us as soon as he sees us, I know. We'll have Dolan at our mercy then, eh, Pill?"

Then I briefly explained how we had been circumvented, and the machinery of fictitious letters and telegrams that had been used to remove us at the last moment. Dumoinés listened, at first amazed, and then he burst out laughing.

"Hanged if it isn't the queerest, sportiest thing I ever heard of. I wouldn't have missed it for a farm. Gad, I'd like to take you up. The money would come in handy if we got it, and the story would make a great advertisement for me."

"But no advertising till we get back," I warned him.

"Oh, no—I mean, *if* we got back. The airship could do the distance all right——"

"Then you'll accept our offer," I said. I had to set my teeth to prevent my lips from trembling at this critical moment.

The aeronaut gave a Parisian shrug. "I

didn't say so. The airship can do the distance, I was saying, if there were no head winds. But you want me to go north-west, I believe, and it's precisely north-west winds that prevail at this time of year on this coast."

This was a rough check. What he said was undeniable. I glanced out of the window, with the tears rising to my eyes, tears of rage and disappointment. But through them I caught a glimpse of a flag across the roofs, an American flag, and it was blowing out its brilliant white and red to seaward.

"Look!" I shouted, exultantly. "It's Providence—an east wind!"

"By gad, I'll do it!" Dumoinex exclaimed. "That's an omen. I'll take the risk, if you fellows will—and we'll start to-night!"

"You're the man for us!" Pill shouted; but I could not have uttered a word.

"Now we've got to hustle!" went on the balloonist, sharply. "Luckily, the airship's ready; she only needs to be inflated. She's at the yard, out in the suburbs back of the city, and I'll go out and see to her at once. Mean-

while you fellows must buy what we need, condensed supplies and tools—not over fifty pounds if possible. Meet me at the balloon shed at six o'clock. Take a car to the East End, and anybody'll tell you where my shop is. It's fairly conspicuous."

Pill and I set about our buying in haste and had it finished before noon, spending nearly a hundred dollars of the expense money. We purchased three revolvers and a hundred cartridges, a quantity of preserved meat, biscuits and condensed milk—for I was not so sure of the stores on the "island" as I had professed to be—a couple of bottles of sherry, a few simple medicines, a couple of light shovels and three really efficient gold-pans. Dumoinès had, of course, all the scientific apparatus necessary for navigating the balloon.

After our successful interview with the aeronaut I had been on the highest peaks of elation; it had seemed to me that the nuggets were as good as in our hands. But now that the hour of the voyage was at hand, I was disgusted to perceive that my nerve was near

failing me. The risk was so enormous; the journey was so unprecedented. If the motor should break down we would be whirled about at the mercy of the Pacific winds till we sank, first to the surface and then to the bottom of the sea. The same dénouement would be reached more quickly through a not unlikely leak in the gas-bag; and even if we managed to reach the berg safely there was a fair chance that we should never be able to leave it again.

I was badly frightened, and from certain manifestations I judged that Pill's condition was not unlike my own. But I would not have given up the undertaking for anything; the alternative was too hideous. However, with the consciousness that I would very likely never see Goldendale again, I wrote to Jessie.

I mentioned that Pill and I were sending her four hundred dollars in an express package, and that we were leaving for the iceberg that day. I said nothing of Dolan's treachery, and left her to suppose that we were sailing on the yacht; and then I came to the exe-

cution of a somewhat quixotic plan that I had been meditating all day.

"I also wish to entrust a very important commission to you," I wrote. "Enclosed you will find a sealed letter for the Bank of Goldendale. If you do not hear from me before the end of June I want you to deliver that letter to the manager of the bank with your own hands, and tell him how you got it. But do not under any circumstances deliver it an hour before the end of June. I can't explain just what it means, but my honour, almost my life, and your brother's honour too, are involved."

The enclosed letter was a complete confession that it was I who had forged Hollis' name to the joint note, and I stated that Pill and Oliver knew nothing of how I had procured the signature.

This act was not really so generous as it might seem, for I knew that before the end of June I would be either dead or rich. In the

latter case the letter would not be delivered; in the former a charge of forgery would matter very little to me, and Jessie would be saved from the belief that her brother had died a criminal.

Pill also wrote to Jessie, but I do not know what he said, except that he told her nothing of the true situation. Naturally I did not tell him what I had done.

When we had finished our purchases we had nothing more to do. We called at the hotel for Dumoines; he was not there, and we had scarcely expected to find him. The hours dragged heavily. We were too full of nervous anticipations to be able to amuse ourselves, and we hung about the hotel, perambulated the streets, tried to read newspapers, till at half-past five we took a car that carried us far into the city's outskirts.

The conductor directed us how to find the balloon shed, and we walked a quarter of a mile through a squalid district, and then we saw the huge black bulk of the airship towering above some sheds surrounded by a tight

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board fence. At a distance it looked exactly like the rounded back of an enormous elephant.

We were admitted through a small door by a suspicious workman, and Dumoinés came to meet us. His coat was off, his hands and face were smeared with oil and engine-black and the pockets of his overalls were full of wrenches. Evidently he was not above putting his own hand to the wheels.

"All ready?" said Pill with a queer quaver, which he tried to swallow.

"Practically ready. How do you like the looks of her?"

The big flying-machine had held my eyes from the moment the gate was opened. At the first glance it resembled an immense black bologna sausage floating in the air, with a spidery gallery depending from it by wires and braces. At one end was a great four-bladed propeller like a windmill, and beneath this a complicated arrangement of broad sheet-metal planes that I supposed to be the rudder.

There was a strong smell of gas about the place, and the great machine shivered and swayed in the breeze, tugging at the cables that anchored it down.

With all the pride of an inventor the aeronaut exhibited the contrivance to us in detail. The long gas-bag was strengthened and stiffened with steel braces, and the car, or gallery, where we were to sit, was a shallow and narrow steel basket about twenty feet long, slung by a network of fine steel cordage. This car contained three seats, and the stern one faced a small switchboard bearing a confusion of levers, weels, gauges, and cranks. A steering-wheel like that of an automobile controlled the rudders, and exactly amidships was the gasoline engine and tank that supplied the power. All round the car hung little sacks of ballast, and two cords, one black and one red, dangled from the upper works. These were the valve and the rip cords, respectively.

I took the sort of painful interest in this elaborate and delicate mechanism that a con-

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demned man might take in the gallows. It gave me a giddiness to look into the evening blue of the sky.

At a hotel a few blocks away we had dinner together at Dumoin's expense, and he did not spare the cost. The champagne flowed lavishly; we were all keyed up to concert pitch with anticipation, and the wine produced a nervous and uncertain hilarity that lasted till we went back in the dusk to the balloon yard.

The news of the projected ascent had spread somehow, for there was a group of people waiting for us in the street, and two or three newspaper men who entreated admission to the shed. Dumoin shut them all out, however, and after a careful look over the whole apparatus, he climbed into the car and sat down in the stern. We followed him, and four or five workmen held her down with their weight on the ropes.

"The east wind still holds—a miracle at this time of year. I take it for a sign of luck," said the expert. "All ready?"

"Yes!" I answered, between clenched teeth; and, "Yes!" said Pill.

"Let go, then!" Dumoines shouted, and dropped a couple of large sacks of ballast over the side.

I had expected some sort of shock, but instead the earth, and then the shed roofs, suddenly fell away from us. There was no sensation of rising, only the rapid, strange disappearance of the earth.

I saw a lighted street below me, and then, like an illuminated map, the whole area of the city spread out in lines of fire. It grew wider, and at the same time less distinct, and I could see that we were passing over it, drifting seaward on the wind.

Suddenly the rapid, snapping purr of the gasoline engine began under our feet. The airship quivered as the big propeller began to revolve. I felt the suck of cool air from its wings, and the machine turned its head to the sea.

The lighted city slid past us, a quarter of a mile below. The hum of the motor rose in

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pitch; the propeller was a mere circle of blackness in the gloom. Seattle became a brilliant streak in the distance. There was water under us. We were in for it! Our last stake was on the board.

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CHAPTER XVI

THROUGH THE AIR

THE weird strangeness of thus putting forth into the air kept me silent with a kind of awe, though I did not feel the expected giddiness. It was hard to realise that we were soaring at a height of a thousand feet. Our forward motion was more perceptible, for the wind of our flight hummed and sang through the steel ropes, and at every pulsation of the motor I could feel the whole fabric throb and leap with the propulsion of the powerful screw.

We crossed the coast and presently I saw lights ashore again below us. We were heading north-west and should strike the Pacific near the corner of Vancouver Island. Dumoinès was whistling blithely, and presently he turned on a tiny electric glow lamp, the size of a marble, to look at the switch-board.

"Twenty-eight miles an hour from the screw," he remarked, after this inspection, "and that's besides the speed of the wind, which we can't calculate. Say thirty-five or forty altogether. We'll be above the sea in three hours."

"We ought to sight the berg—I mean, the island, some time before noon to-morrow, then," said Pill, out of the darkness.

"Easily if the wind holds. I can let her out a few notches more, if you like. How do you fellows feel?"

I was beginning to feel queerly. I was conscious of a growing exhilaration, a kind of irresponsible joy, that made me want to move, sing, talk or yell. I laid it to the wine I had drunk before starting.

"I feel—I'm beginning to feel jagged!" Pill gurgled.

He half rose in his seat, and the airship lurched.

"Sit down!" yelled Dumoinés, and I saw suddenly the nickelled glitter of a pistol in his hand. At the sight an immediate and over-

whelming terror took possession of me, such as I had never felt before.

Pill subsided, and I moistened my dry lips, trembling, but the panic was gone almost as rapidly as it had come.

"You're not jagged; you're air-sick," continued the balloon expert. "The first ascent always makes you that way. It'll wear off directly, but if you move about you'll spill us all out."

But I found it strangely hard to sit still. My head felt light, almost as if it were about to float off into space by itself. My former sense of excitement returned, coupled with a joyous feeling of liberty, and, strangely enough of security. I forced myself to remain motionless, however, and by degrees these abnormal sensations wore off, though I had recurring touches of them for some hours.

That night's rush through the air was then, and has remained in my mind like a weird dream—the strangest, though far from the most unpleasant, experience of my life. We could see nothing; above our heads was the

apparently solid mass of the gas-bag like a world hanging over us, and below and on all sides was thick darkness. In spite of the pointed wind-shield a keen current of chilly air whistled past our heads, and it grew bitter cold. No stars were to be seen. There was no sound but the howl of the wind and the incessant deep-toned hum of the big screw that was driving us at the speed of a railway train.

That night was very long. I was afraid to sleep, but I dozed a little and grew cramped, almost frozen in my place. I was facing the stern, and I saw the first, faint lightening of the east. The propeller began to outline itself as a black disk, and by degrees I made out the outline of the car, the curving belly of the balloon overhead, and the cramped forms of my companions, all dripping with dew.

White clouds were under us, vast, billowy masses that looked solid enough to walk upon, and by looking down upon their surface I was able adequately to realise our speed for the first time. The airship was indeed flying,

and the whole fabric hummed and vibrated like a taut wire. In a few moments we ran sheer into a thick bank of cloud; a saturating mist enveloped us and tore past in wisps and streaks as we dashed through it. I was barely able to discern Dumoinés' figure in the stern, ten feet away; but there was no danger of collision or rocks on this line.

Then suddenly we dashed out on the other side. The clouds cleared under us, and I saw, far down, the grey, wrinkled surface of the Pacific, an empty plain, with not a sail or smoke to the whole rounded horizon.

The sun came up gloriously, and under its warmth the balloon rose several hundred feet. Dumoinés told us that he had thrown out twenty pounds of ballast during the night, but that the ship was nevertheless six hundred feet lower than when we had set out.

However, the craft had proved its efficiency nobly, though some credit was of course due to the wind, which still blew fresh at the after quarter. We estimated—or, rather, our pilot did—that we had travelled nearly

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four hundred miles, and as we were steering in a line to cross the iceberg's path I expected to sight it within an hour or two.

Yet I felt cold, damp and dispirited, and it was not until we had breakfasted on tinned chicken, condensed milk and sherry that my courage revived. Dumoines would not let us smoke for fear of explosion, and from time to time I saw him glance at the barometer and staiscope, and then throw out a handful of sand.

"Are we sinking?" I inquired, at last.

The aeronaut grunted. "More than I like. She's leaking gas a good deal—heaven knows how! I had her all looked over yesterday."

"Good Lord!" cried Pill. "Won't she hold out for the distance?"

"Depends on how far away your island is. I'll let her out a little more."

The note of the propeller rose to a shriller tone. The air split cuttingly on the prow and roared over us in a furious blast. We were making much more than forty miles an hour, perhaps fifty, but I could see without instru-

ments that the slate-coloured sea had come up much nearer, and also that more than half of the little sacks of sand ballast had disappeared.

It was a race against time now, and against the leaking gas. Mile after mile we rushed on, and yard after yard we sank, till we could plainly see the long swell washing and breaking under the car. Then a scoopful of sand would go overboard and the ship would rise with a bound of a hundred yards, and then the slow sinking would be repeated.

Another hour and another wore away in these alternations, but as the sun grew hotter the balloon manifested more buoyancy. According to our closest calculations I felt sure that we must be in the neighbourhood of the berg, and we sacrificed several pounds of ballast at once to rise to a height of two thousand feet, where we would have a wider view.

From this elevation Pill and I swept the sea with strong glasses—in vain! There was no glimmer of ice in the sun, nothing but the

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faint trail of a steamer's smoke on the sky to the south-east.

Pill and Dumoinés both looked at me in silent doubt. I was terribly uneasy, though I tried to conceal it. Could the iceberg have melted away already, or had we miscalculated its course? If we failed to sight it within a few hours—I looked down at the deep sea and thought of the fast-leaking gas.

"How many miles more will your gas last—and your gasoline?" I inquired.

"Perhaps a hundred. We could reach that ship in time to be picked up," said the aeronaut, nodding at the distant smoke-trail.

I glanced at Pill; his face looked determined, and for myself I had so arranged my affairs that I must return victorious or not at all.

"No. We'll find what we're after or go to the bottom!" I exclaimed. "Push her to her last limit. It can't be far now."

We had been sinking for fifteen minutes, and half a sack of ballast sent her soaring

again. Through the air we tore at desperate speed, while Pill and I held the glasses continually at our eyes. Dumoinés looked far from easy, but he said nothing.

After almost an hour of flying thus toward the north-west, we ascended again to a great height for a wide survey of the ocean. But the field was still empty. Even the steamer's smoke had now disappeared.

"Take her round in wide curves," I ordered our pilot. "We're bound to sight it soon."

"There's only gasoline enough for another hour," said Dumoinés. "And there are only three sacks of ballast left. We'd better try to make that steamer while we can."

"No," I retorted stubbornly.

"I say yes!" replied the Frenchman. "We've shaved it quite fine enough already. In two hours we'd be at the bottom."

"I don't care. I'll blow out your brains if you steer her anywhere except as I direct you. Pill, stand by me!" and as I spoke I covered him with my revolver.

Pill, though reluctantly, bravely produced his pistol likewise. The aeronaut scowled rebelliously, but our two muzzles covered him and the odds were too great. I might have sympathised with him, but I was mad at that moment, desperate, and fully determined never to see land again without the gold.

Round went the airship again like a circling hawk, in a great arc of miles. She sank too, running down on a terribly swift incline as she flew. And still there was nothing to break the monotony of the ocean's surface.

"Another big wheel, and more to the north," I ordered; and we swept round again. There was only one sack of ballast left now, and Pill's courage gave way at last.

"Dick," he entreated, "for God's sake——!"

We had rounded another arc and nothing was in sight. But I was in no condition to listen to reason. The last sack of sand hung near me, and I tossed it overboard.

"There!" I exclaimed with clenched teeth. "Make the best of it. We can't get to that steamer now."

Pill groaned. The airship shot up instantly to a height of nearly a thousand feet, and my glass roved over the sea with terrible eagerness. But in my heart I had almost given up hope.

Pill was looking too, and all at once he touched my shoulder.

"What's that flash ahead and a little to the north?" he whispered.

I turned my glass on the spot, and certainly saw something glitter on the sea, but I could not make it out clearly. I kept the lens focussed on it, agonised with hope and fear, while the airship drove toward it at half a mile a minute. Then I caught a glimpse that was unmistakable—a glimmer of brilliant greenish white on the sea, the certain glitter of ice in the sun.

"That's it, by Heaven!" I shouted. "Dumoinès, you fool, we've sighted it. There it is! Here, take a look."

The balloonist looked, glanced strangely at us and looked again.

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"Why, that's no island, man. That's an iceberg," he said, at last.

"Of course. The mine's on an iceberg. That's the spot."

The Frenchman's jaw dropped and he turned pale.

"What do you mean? You said we were making for an island. An iceberg—are you both crazy?"

He told us afterward that he firmly believed that we were both stark mad, and that he gave himself up in that moment as hopelessly lost. It was fortunate, for his total despair made him docile.

"We didn't dare to tell you the truth before," I explained. "If we had, you wouldn't have come. But I swear that the gold is on that iceberg right enough, and you must land us there. It's the only solid spot we can reach now, anyway."

"You're right. If you had told me that story in Seattle I wouldn't have come for all the gold in the States," said Dumoinés, ear-

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nestly. "But I suppose we'll have to try to land there. I hope we do it. It's no easy matter to come down on so small a spot as that."

He slowed the propeller a little. The airship was skimming ahead like a swallow, slanting momentarily nearer the waves. I could see the iceberg distinctly now, the spray that dashed high upon its sides, the precipitous cliffs, and the rushing streams from the melted ice. For a few minutes I had feared that this might not be the right iceberg, but now I knew that it was indeed the glacier-fragment where I had already spent a week. I could make out the beds of gravel; I recognised its shape, for, though all its outlines were more rounded, it did not seem to have diminished much in size.

It was no more than half a mile away—and now it was only half of that. We were so low that it seemed as if we were going to collide with it. Dumoines stopped the engine and stood up, grasping the crimson rope that swung over his head.



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"Be ready to jump when we come over it!" he yelled. "I'm going to rip her."

"Everybody take a shovel and pan," I called, with a sudden lucky inspiration, picking up these implements.

Though the screw was still, our impetus and the wind drove us on, swooping down toward the ice. In a flash I saw its ridges twenty feet under us; it was there—it was passing!

"Jump!" Damoines shrieked, and pulled the red cord.

I heard a great ripping noise from the top of the balloon, that seemed to falter and collapse, as I leaped out wildly. I struck the hard ice with a terrible shock, and as I rolled over and over I caught a glimpse of the balloon springing aloft again.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CLEAN-UP

PILL had fallen almost upon me, and as I picked myself up I saw him looking dazedly around. Dumoines had stayed at his post an instant too long, had fallen into the sea, and was clutching at the slippery edges of the ice in an endeavour to get out.

The airship had risen again when lightened of her passengers, but as I looked up I saw her plunge into the water with a gigantic splash, fifty yards away. For a moment she floated with her vast silk envelope heaving on the waves, and then the waves went over her and we saw her no more. It was the last flight of the machine that had served us so well.

We hauled Dumoines out without difficulty, and his first glance was at the balloon, which was just vanishing under the Pacific.

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He watched it as long as a scrap of silk remained in sight and then turned a fiercely resentful gaze upon me.

"Well, here we are!" he said. "I've carried out my contract, and I hope you're satisfied, confound you! I'll expect you to get me out of this scrape. Where is your gold mine?" and his eyes swept the surface of the berg contemptuously.

Pill said nothing. I picked up a handful of the moist gravel at my feet and sifted it through my fingers. A tiny yellow scale caught my eye, and I handed it to the Frenchman.

He and Pill examined it with eagerness.

"Gad. It looks like gold, sure enough!" said Dumoines. "But how in the name of wonder does gold come to be here?"

In a few sentences I explained to him my theory of the Alaskan glacier.

"You may be right," he admitted. "I believe you are. I thought you were simply crazy, but I beg your pardon. Let's dig up some more."

I picked up the pan which had fallen near me, filled it with gravel and water, and began to whirl the mixture. Little by little the discoloured water slipped over the sides; the sand and stones flew out; I was approaching the bottom. Pill and Dumoinés leaned eagerly over my shoulder, and when I poured out the last of the water and showed a dozen shining flecks in the sediment they raised a shout.

"It's gold! it's gold!" Dumoinés shrieked.

"Our fortunes are made. Let's get to work!"

I never saw a man so excited, and in fact the first colour from a gold mine is apt to go to the head. Slipping, stumbling and regardless of his soaked clothing, he ran up the slope, with Pill and me at his heels.

There was the gravel I had washed, in half-frozen, muddy heaps. There was the cave I had hewn out, melted now into a mere hollow, and there were my meat tins and my axe and my tin basin, all red with thick rust.

Yes, and there in my former burrow was gold that I had spilled in my hasty departure, a little heap of dull-shining yellow lumps and

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dust, sinking into the ice. There was less than a small handful of it, but enough to certify the truth of my tale.

Pill and Dumoinés gave another simultaneous hurrah at this sight. Evidently no one had set foot on the berg since my departure, and the mine was still to be worked.

But a more careful inspection showed that the surface of the ice island had changed greatly, after all. The elevations were lower; the hollows were deeper, the flowing water was more abundant, and there was much more gravel exposed than when I had left it. Great lumps of ice appeared to have been broken off, and the former sloping beach had almost disappeared. I judged that almost a third of its former bulk was gone, and since it was drifting into warmer waters it did not appear likely to last more than two or three weeks more.

Without any further loss of time we went to work. Dumoinés would not hear of delay and indeed we had nothing else to do and no other way of warming ourselves, for the sea

wind blew cold over the ice. We gathered up our tools; Pill had thrown a pan overboard when he jumped; I had taken another pan and a shovel with me, and, with the axe, this was quite enough for our purposes.

So we set Dumoinés to break up and dig out the gravel with the axe and shovel, while Pill and I went to work with our pans beside one of the rushing streams of icy water.

It was all like my first sojourn on the berg, only this time there was movement round me, the sound of tools and the voices of friends. The clothes dried on Dumoinés' back as he worked, and Pill and I became wet and splattered and gradually soaked without noticing it, for the gold-fever had us all hard. But we made wonderful progress, for when we knocked off, tired out, muddy and wet from head to foot and faint with hunger, we had a great heap of cleaned-up gravel and a big handful of pure, wet, heavy yellow metal.

It was almost sunset, and we had laboured since long before midday, having eaten nothing since dawn. I had hoped to be able to

prepare hot soup as before, but I discovered that both my lamps were broken, and we were obliged to satisfy our hunger with cold fare from the stores of the *Bolivia*. The blankets I had left in my cave were completely sodden, so that we had a sufficiently uncomfortable night, huddled together for the sake of mutual warmth.

My sleep, when I did sleep, was restless, full of nightmares, of dizzy heights, of freezing, of drowning, of immense wealth that always slipped through my fingers, so that the dawn found me shivering and unrefreshed. I would have given a hundred dollars in gold for a cup of hot coffee. Pill looked miserably pinched and unhappy in the cold dawn, but Dumoin's spirit was unconquerable. He dashed ice-water over his hands and face, looked about mechanically for a towel, and dried himself with his damp coat sleeve.

"Breakfast, boys!" he cried. "And then we'll get after our everlasting fortunes again."

The half-frozen meat and hard biscuits

were not easy to swallow but they produced a certain internal warmth, and, somewhat comforted, we set to work again with axe, shovel and gold-pan. We worked hard and long that day, and by nightfall we estimated that we had cleaned up nearly thirty ounces.

We did not expect to see anything of the yacht for two or three days at least. But if she delayed longer than that, the question of the food supply would become serious. We had lost the stores we had brought in the balloon, and there was nothing left but what I had landed from the *Bolivia*. Much of this had been washed away or spoiled by the wet. There was not enough to last us for more than three days, at our present rate of consumption, and we decided to put ourselves upon fixed rations so as to spin out the provisions for two or three days longer. Meanwhile we looked almost hourly over the sea for the feather of smoke that would announce the *Chrysalis*; and how we hoped now that the Spanish girl had remembered my sailing directions correctly!

But another day passed, and another and another—days of hard labour from dawn till dark and nights of sleep so heavy that we did not notice wet or cold. Only two of us slept at a time, however, for we took turns in keeping guard so that Dolan might not take us unawares.

The weather had turned disagreeable, with a good deal of mist and warm rains that made our ice island dissolve almost visibly. I feared that we were reaching the warm Japan current, but we dug and washed the harder, and with three pairs of arms at work the results were surprising.

The gravel now seemed richer too, and once Dumoinès brought us a shovelful of stuff that really appeared to be all gold. It was a pocket, and that shovelful of gravel cleaned up over thirteen ounces of coarse gold.

That was an exception, of course, but in those four days we stored away two hundred ounces of the precious stuff, worth well over four thousand dollars. It was no great fortune

but it promised well for the future, for there was plenty of gravel left.

But on the following night Pill, who had been standing guard, awoke me at about three in the morning.

"What's the matter?" I said irritably, for I was tired and very sleepy.

"Take a look at that light. I've been watching it for half an hour."

"A star, I guess," I suggested, at the first glance at the luminary, which was so faint as to be almost invisible at all.

"No, it moves," said Pill, earnestly; and as I gazed at the dimly bright speck in the distance it really seemed to me that I detected a slow motion. Yet I was far from certain whether it was a star or something much nearer.

We awoke Dumoines, and we all stared through the darkness at the bright spot, which presently became certainly motionless. Was it a ship? Was it the yacht? We wavered from one opinion to another till the grey light began to spread over the Pacific.

Then there was no further room for doubt. Vaguely in the dawn we made out the black outline of a small steamer lying motionless a mile to the southeast.

We all got out of sight behind the heaps of gravel, but continued to gaze. The form of the ship grew more distinct, and I longed vainly for a glass. She carried no flag, no smoke rose from her funnel, and with the unaided eye we could not make out any figure on her decks.

Was it the *Chrysalis*? It appeared to be about the same size, but we could not have recognised our yacht at even a shorter distance. We had never seen her except when lying at her slip, and no general notion of a ship's appearance can be thus obtained.

Presently a faint cloud appeared above the steamer's funnel and she got under way, but slowly. She moved up perhaps half a mile nearer, and stopped again. This manoeuvre made me almost certain of her identity.

"If it's your friends, I suppose—pistols, eh?" observed Dumoinés.

"You'll stand by us?" said Pill, interrogatively.

"I should rather think so! Do you suppose I'd let myself be done out of this gold-field? Look there!"

As he spoke, there was a vague stir on the yacht, and a boat dropped over the side, and started toward us. It looked tiny as a nutshell as it heaved and fell on the rollers.

"That's Doian, sure!" I said. "Be ready"

I twirled the cylinder of my revolver under my thumb. The boat came rapidly nearer. It was rowed by two men with their backs to us, but a third man faced us from the stern, wearing a wide sou'wester. When the craft was within fifty yards I saw what expected—the gleam of a red moustache under that great hat. I heard a click from Pill's revolver. He had seen it too.

The boat came up to the berg and began to circle it to find a landing-place. The sloping shore had melted away, and Dolan had finally to scramble precariously up an irregu-

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lar spot while the seamen held the boat close to the ice.

For a few moments we could not see him, though we heard the crunching of his boots on the sand and gravel. Then his head and shoulders loomed into view.

He was curiously examining something as he walked, which proved to be one of our empty meat tins, which he no doubt took to be evidence that he had come to the right place. He wandered right up to the heaps of gravel where we crouched. He was almost within arm's length when I sprang up and brought the black barrel of my pistol in line with his eyes. Pill and Dumoinés rose silently on either side of me, armed and menacing.

I do not suppose that there ever was a man more startled than was Dolan in that instant. And no wonder, at the apparition in that mid-sea spot of the men he thought he had outwitted and left five hundred miles away. He made a queer choking noise in his throat, and his eyes almost started from his head. I think that for a moment he believed us to be either

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"I brought the black barrel of my pistol in line with his eyes."

ghosts or a hallucination, but he put up his hands in an unconscious sort of way.

I had really intended to kill the man, but at the sight of his utter collapse I could not nerve myself to his murder.

"This is your last steal, Dolan," I said sternly and shot the sou'wester from his head.

Dolan did not stir, but he looked absolutely relieved at this tangible threat, and he moistened his lips several times.

"How—how did you get here?" he managed to articulate, and his voice was even squeakier than usual.

"We swam," said Pill severely. "And that's how you'll have to go back."

Dolan contrived a weak grin. His keen little eyes were roving from side to side, and I saw that he was already beginning to recover from his stupefaction.

"We're going aboard the yacht," I said. "We won't take you, Dolan. You wanted to come here, and now you may stay."

The fact was that I feared the fellow's measureless audacity and cunning too much

to allow him to come with us. I was very glad of an opportunity to isolate him for a time, for I was not quite sure what stand the captain would take.

When the seamen in the boat recognised Pill and me they were struck with almost supernatural terror, and they rowed back to the yacht as if the devil were afloat with them. Across the water we could see Dolan standing alone like a pinnacle on the crest of the berg, looking eagerly after us. No doubt he too was speculating on the probable action of the skipper.

As we came alongside I made out the hard, dry face of our captain leaning over the rail. There were other faces, too, and among them was that of Miss Ines Ranon, in a crimson yachting cap—pale as death, with her great eyes staring roundly. I think that she was the first on board to recognise us.

"What was that shot? Where's Mr. Dolan? Who have you got there?" cried the captain in excitement. Then, as we clambered over the rail—"My God, Mr. Shields, it can't be

you! It's impossible! And Mr. Gordon! How ever did you get to this place?"

"Never mind how we got here," snapped Pill. "We're here, all right. The question is, how do you come to be here? Why did you sail without our orders?"

"But I had your orders—your letter," stammered Captain Hart, much confused. "You said that I was to go to sea without you, and take orders from Mr. Dolan. Here's the letter," diving into the pockets of his jacket.

"Never mind the letter. I didn't write it."

"Dolan wrote it himself," put in the *señorita*, calmly.

The skipper glared at her, speechless. His face clouded to a dark purple, and then he swore a terrific sea oath.

"Then I've been made a fool of, and a liar, and a—a mutineer on my own ship!" he cried, bursting with rage. "You and your red-headed Irishman 'll get your dues, miss, when we reach port. Gentlemen, I can't apologise—this is the first time that such a

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thing ever happened to me! But the ship's at your service now, anyway, and as for that fellow, I'll put him in irons. But how did you beat us here?"

"Yes, how did you get here?" Miss Ranon demanded.

"In a balloon," I said, curtly.

An astonished murmur ran through the crew, who had edged up to listen, and the *señorita* looked us up and down with whole-souled admiration.

"You two are men. There's no beating you!" she exclaimed.

Dumoinès was gazing at her with all his eyes.

"Present me to the lady," he whispered punching me in the ribs.

"Don't stand on ceremony with her. It isn't necessary," I said aloud. "Captain, don't say any more. I see how you were fooled, and we won't blame you. We've more important work to do. Do you know what we're here for? There's gold-bearing graves in that ice. Ask the hands if any of them

want to hire as miners at five dollars a day."

The men tumbled over one another to accept. Every one of the crew, down to the Chinese cook, volunteered, and we had to arrange to take them in turn, to give them all a chance without leaving the ship empty. They hurried the picks, shovels, flume-sections and the rest of the mining apparatus into the boats, while we three had our first warm meal for five days.

Five sailors went back to the berg with us, jubilant as schoolboys at the prospect of big wages. We found Dolan closely examining the scene of our operations.

"You've got a good thing here, gentlemen," he began. "I only half believed it, but I see that it was no lie you were telling me. Would you care to sell, now—either the whole or a share?"

"We would not," I told him.

"And yet you joined partnership with me," the Irishman reminded us. "I got the yacht——"

"You'll get five dollars a day, the same as the men, if you want to handle a shovel and dig gravel," said Pill.

Dolan shrugged his shoulders.

"I want to speak to you alone," he said, nodding to me. I walked away with him, prepared for some attempt at corruption. But money was not in his mind at all.

"I want you to tell me on your word of honour just how it stands betwixt you and Miss Ranon," he said, and to my astonishment I saw his red face working and sweating with emotion.

"Nothing stands at all," I replied. "There's nothing whatever between us. I'm engaged to marry a girl in Southern California, and I trust that I'll never set eyes on Señorita Ines again after we land, for I fear her as I fear damnation."

"Faith, and I'm powerful glad to hear the same word," said Dolan, and his brow asserted itself under the stress of emotion.

"I'm to marry her, you'll know, and it's myself would die at her feet if she wanted

Oh, I know all about her, and all she's tried to do to me, but I'm not afraid of her. I thought she'd taken a fancy to you. I thought so first in Vermilion, and I was sure of it in Sacramento, and I'd kill you this minute if I though* so now. I went into this foolish gold scheme to plaze her, and I played that dhurty trick on you because she came and offered to sail with me alone. I didn't care anything about the blasted gold; I've business going to waste now that's worth ten of that. I wanted to work with her, that's all, d'ye see?"

He stopped and looked at me dumbly, pathetically, and I could see how his passion was eating into the steel and flint of his nature.

"You're not so bad after all, Dolan," I said, softened. "You're a long way better than she is, I do believe."

"No, I'll never be in her class," he answered. "But I know how to get her. Money and power are all she cares for, and she'll marry the man that's got them. I've sweated blood to get them for her; I've lied

and I've robbed and I've murdered, and I think I've got them in sight now. I want to get back to Sacramento right away to look after them."

"You're a rascal, Dolan," I told him. "And I guess you'll deserve all you get for whatever it is. But your swindles in Sacramento will have to wait. This business comes first."

I went back to my companions, who were waiting for me with considerable curiosity. I did not reveal the subject of my conversation with the Irishman, however, and they began work on the gravel without delay. The men worked energetically, and in a couple of hours we had rigged a flume that we had brought in sections, and charged it with quicksilver, and had a vigorous gush of water pouring down its length. Four men with shovels fed it with gravel, and Pillsbury and I watched it with drawn revolvers.

Meanwhile Dumoinés worked with a pickaxe and the results of this systematic and, for the first time, really scientific labour were as

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ishing. When we collected the tailings that night and cleaned up the amalgam we found the extraordinary amount of five hundred ounces of pure gold. One of our seamen, who had mined in Alaska, told me that only once had he ever seen a richer run.

We slept on the yacht that night, and after that day we kept Dolan a prisoner in his cabin, though we did not follow the skipper's suggestion as to putting him in irons. Neither would we allow the *señcrista* to visit the berg, in spite of her entreaties.

Next morning at dawn the mining was resumed. Food was sent us from the yacht at noon, and eaten in fifteen minutes; then a fresh shift of men was sent from on board. The flume spouted its muddy water incessantly, and the nuggets and dust gathered fast under the riffles. We had to stop work and clean out the amalgam twice that day, though all the nuggets big enough to pick up were kept out of the flume.

I have no doubt that the men surreptitiously pocketed a good many, but we made no

attempt to search them. Just then a nugget more or less seemed of little consequence. For the gravel was running with continued richness. We were burrowing into the ice now splintering it out with picks and pulverising it to get out the sand.

In one spot the men found a nest of nuggets and dust big enough to fill a three-quarter pail, mingled with only a little gravel. Luckily, Pill happened to be present when they uncovered it, or we might not have had three nuggets of the size of a pipe-bowl. This was the greatest single stroke we made, but even at night we went back to the yacht with a sack as heavy as a tired man would care to lift.

And there was need for every effort we could make, for the berg was obviously melting faster every day. We had drifted into the warmer waters of the Pacific, and great cracks and openings were beginning to show in the ice. We thought that we should finish getting it in ten or twelve days more, but after the fourth day of work we decided that we would have to work day and night.

Accordingly, we rigged great flares of oakum, old rope and engine-waste, soaked in tar or machine oil, and fixed them on iron bars set in the ice. The berg must have presented a weird nocturnal spectacle, if there had been any one to wonder at it—flaming with smoky lights, resounding with blows of picks and the shouting of men, while the lighted steamer lay off a quarter of a mile.

We had to take turns at sleeping, and in fact it seems to me as if, during the last five days, I never slept at all. But I was certainly asleep, and very soundly, in my berth when Pill awoke me. I had supposed that he was with the night shift on the ice, and I sat up in instant alarm. He was splashed and dripping with mud and water, and was shaking me vigorously.

"Wake up! Get up, quick!" he was saying. "Something's wrong with the berg."

As I jumped out of my berth I felt the vibration of the yacht's engines. She had started suddenly ahead. I slipped on my coat and trousers and ran up to the deck.

The captain was there and Dumoinés and Miss Ranon and the muddy mining shift that had just come aboard, all gazing over the rail at the ice island that flared with its torches through the night. It was not dark; there was brilliant starlight, and the outline of the berg loomed phantom-like on the sea.

"I thought we'd better knock off work and come aboard," said Pill. "She began to act so queer——"

He was interrupted by a series of dull, heavy reports, like far-away guns, coming apparently from the sea beneath the berg.

"Like that," Pill finished. "What do you think she's going to do? The skipper's got up steam to move a little farther away."

I had no theory to offer. The berg could scarcely be breaking up so suddenly. The idea of a submarine volcano came into my mind. I was glad at any rate that we were moving fast from the threatening spot.

It was fortunate indeed. For, as we all gazed in silence there came a great rushing noise, like nothing else I ever heard, except

perhaps, the roar of Niagara. But this roar was crescendo, and then the whole iceberg seemed suddenly to rise into the air.

The distant torches went out. The berg balanced for an instant upon one edge, and then fell with a crash that seemed to split sea and sky. Nothing was visible but an enormous cloud of mist and spray that spattered on our deck even at that great distance.

The yacht rolled her rails under, and then I saw a gigantic wave rushing toward us, so lofty that its whitened crest seemed to tower up to twice the height of our masts.

"Hold fast, everybody, for your lives!" howled the skipper, and I heard the clang of the engine-room signal.

Then we were lifted up—up—till we stood as it were on a mountain top, looking wide over the ocean, and I thought that we were going to ride the wave. Then, with a smothering crash, its crest broke over our decks.

For a moment the ship was a wild chaos of water and foam that rushed high over the

level of the rails. I was banged and whirled about, though I clung to a steel stay with a death-grip, and saved myself from going overboard. Then the *Chrysalis* emerged, with a yard of water foaming on her deck and washing over the scattered forms of her crew.

Down we went again, sliding sickeningly into the chasm behind the big wave, and then up, far up once more, and down again, till at last we lay only moderately tossing on the still disturbed sea and we dared to look round.

The first thing we did was to call a roll, and everybody answered to his name. Not one of us had gone overboard, which was little less than miraculous. Even Miss Ranon had saved herself by clinging with masculine strength to the rail. Dolan was safe too, for I heard him shouting and banging on the door of his locked room below, but no one thought of letting him out.

When the cloud of mist cleared away, the iceberg was still there, but its outline was totally different, and it looked much smaller. We speculated for some time upon this, but

it was the captain who gave us the explanation at last of what had really occurred.

The iceberg had simply turned over, as icebergs have a habit of doing. Melting takes place faster under water than above it, producing an increasing top-heaviness, until the berg finally capsizes and shows a new surface to the world.

It was this new surface that we saw. The question was—could we still get at the pay-streak?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FALLING MARKET

THIS was a question that could not be settled till it grew lighter, and we had to wait for about five hours. We put on dry clothes, had coffee brought on deck for us, and remained there to look at the berg which lay apparently immovable as an island. We kept at a respectful distance during the night, but as soon as dawn made the outlines plain we brought the yacht up to within half a mile, had a boat lowered, and rowed round the berg to examine it closely.

Our fears were justified. Even with powerful glasses we could see no trace of gravel or sand. There was nothing but the green glare of the ice. Evidently the gravel deposits had not extended clear through the berg and now they were on the under side.

"The mine's gone—*borrasca*," said Pilgrimage, using Mexican slang for a played-out lead.

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All our mining apparatus was gone, too. Flume, picks, shovels, had all gone to the bottom, together with our whole stock of quicksilver. Luckily Pill had cleaned up the riffles an hour before the catastrophe, so that not much gold had been lost from the flume.

"It's all over," said Pill, sorrowfully contemplating the glittering mass of ice. "Nothing now but to get back to Goldendale. This is the sixth of June, isn't it?"

"Yes. Lots of time," I replied, for I knew what he was thinking of.

"And we've got enough, after all."

"I should think so!" I said, recalling the big safe in the yacht's cabin that was crammed with bulging canvas sacks.

"Enough to make a big thing of the *Bonanza* too," added Pill, brightening. "Eh, Dick? We'll see Goldendale a big city yet. Oh, let's get back to work. I've had enough of this bloody-war-and-adventure business."

My own heart responded to Pill's words. I would be glad to get back, too. I was tired of the sea, tired of the fever and the vicissi-

tudes of the hunt for the frozen fortune, and I thought with unspeakable longing of the sunny little California town, of the bee-hives in the warm orchard, of—of Jessie, of course.

We rowed back to the *Chrysalis*, each silently occupied with his own thoughts, and climbed aboard for the last time.

"Get full steam up, captain," Pill cried. "It's back to good old California for ours!"

And in a couple of hours the iceberg was out of sight in the west, and falling behind us at the rate of twelve miles an hour. I saw it vanish without regret; I had no desire ever to see it again, and by this time its ice is long since seawater, and its remaining gold has gone to pave the ocean floor.

We let Dolan out of his cabin when we were once well on our homeward way, but always either Pill, Dumoinés or myself stood guard over the safe containing the treasure. The Irishman was extremely anxious to know how much we had cleared, but we did not satisfy his curiosity; in fact, we did not know.

the amount accurately ourselves at that time. He seemed in no way abashed or cast down by his defeat, and he spent most of his time with Miss Ranon, who, to my surprise, seemed to have no objection to his society.

Whenever Dolan was not with her it was Dumoinès, for the French balloonist had become most assiduous in his attendance upon the girl. Whenever he came off guard duty at the safe he went on deck at once to look for her and it was highly entertaining to see his disgust when he saw Dolan's bulky form lounging over the rail beside the *señorita*. The rivalry between the two became a standing, though concealed joke with the rest of us; though I would have dreaded the girl's influence on our too susceptible partner if the game had not been played so nearly to its finish.

It was even nearer than I thought. On the last evening of the voyage I had seen Dolan in close conversation with her for a long time. They were talking by the stern when I went below, and when I came on deck again

two hours later, they were still there. On noticing me, Dolan called me to them.

"Congratulate me, Mr. Shields!" he said and his red face fairly beamed. "Miss Rano and I are going to be married as soon as we land."

Was it true this time? I wondered; but congratulated him, with a side glance at the Spanish girl.

"Yes, you're surprised, but it's really true this time," she said, indifferently. "I'm tired of fighting him. Besides, he has explained to me that he has half a million dollars, and is on his way to become a great political power."

"Almost there," Dolan broke in, earnestly. "Everything's fixed right. I've got control of Sacramento, got it organised, mapped, roped and tied, and after next election I'll have a mayor and council that'll be like my many dolls for me. You've no idea what pictures there are in a deal like that. In another year I'll be boss of the State Legislature, and things turn out right, and they generally do for me. Then she"—indicating Miss Rano

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—"can go and shine in 'Frisco, or New York, or Paris, if she wants to. There won't be nothing in the world too good for her to have. What she wants is the kingdom and the power and the glory and the money, and she can have them by the wagon-load."

"How about the Blackfoot Mine?" I asked.

"The Blackfoot?" Dolan glanced sharply at me, and then doubtfully at his fiancée. "Oh, we've settled that all right," he said vaguely at last, and the *señorita* nodded assent.

I congratulated this remarkable pair once more, not without a secret terror of what their alliance might bring upon the land that was unfortunate enough to hold them. Dumoines came prowling about just then, and I called him.

"Congratulations are in order," I said, rather maliciously. "Our friends here are going to be married as soon as they go ashore."

The aeronaut cast a deadly glance at Dolan,

a reproachful one at me, and turned on his heel without a word. I knew how he felt, but I had less pity for him than he perhaps deserved.

We landed in San Francisco early the next morning, and as soon as business hours arrived, Pill, Dumoines and I went to the Mint to arrange for the disposal of our bullion. Dolan and Miss Ranon vanished silently into the city without an adieu. I have heard of them since; every one has heard of them; but I have never seen them.

There was no trouble and little delay at the Government offices, and we presently had an express-wagon, guarded with half a dozen six-shooters, transporting our gold to the Mint. By noon it was all transferred to the national vaults, and we had in exchange a great bundle of hundred-dollar gold certificates—four thousand three hundred and twenty of them. The division amounted to nearly one hundred and fifty thousand dollars apiece. This was not the half million

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had hoped for, but it was enough, even for Dumoines, who had to deduct the cost of his lost airship.

We, too, had something to deduct. I was determined to compensate the owners of the brig *Oregonian* for whatever loss they had suffered over and above the insurance, and further I intended to look up the relatives of the dead captain and mate, if we could find them, and endeavour to make some kind of anonymous financial consolation. Though these murders had been beyond and far beyond my plans, yet I could not help a feeling of responsibility, and Pill thoroughly shared and approved of my intentions.

But this was still for the future. From the Mint we went straight to find a bank. Dumoines wanted to deposit his money, and Pill and I wished to have our pile transferred to the bank at Goldendale, to avoid having to carry the bulk of notes.

There seemed to be some excitement in the financial quarter of the city that day. I noticed that the stock-brokers' offices were

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crowded, and that there were anxious-looking crowds on the sidewalk outside. There was an intensity in the air, a nervous anticipation on every face; and when we turned the corner upon the Pacific National Bank we found the street blockaded with shouting and enraged citizens, and there was a white placard pinned to the closed door of the institution. But it was too far away to be legible.

"What's the matter?" Pill demanded from the nearest man.

"Bank's closed its doors—bust!" he replied, snappily.

"But why? What's the matter with the town anyway?" Pill persisted.

"It isn't just this town. It's the whole West, I reckon. What's the matter with you? Haven't you heard of the smash of the wheat corner?"

We most certainly had not. But at those words I had a vivid memory of a hotel smoking-room, of a sensation of terrible despair, and of newspaper headlines that said, "June Wheat Still Soaring—Bear Failures R

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ported." So now it was the bulls who had failed.

I had a morning paper in my pocket which hitherto I had been too busy even to glance at, but now I unfolded it hastily, and we all stepped back from the crowd to look at it.

There was the story, or the latter half of it, which has now become mercantile history, of the collapse of the Peabody corner in wheat, a crash where the price had broken at one dollar and eighty cents a bushel and had rushed down to sixty cents in a single afternoon, while the bulls were wildly throwing their holdings overboard to avoid further loss and selling all sorts of securities to cover margins.

The whole stock exchange list had slumped sympathetically from five to twenty points. Money was tight; mercantile houses and banks were going down one after another, and the West was especially hard hit, for the bull movement had been backed more enthusiastically there than anywhere else.

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Dumoinés and Pill leaned over my shoulders as I ran over the story of disaster, told chiefly in the headlines. At first I did not see how all this would affect us, but Pill was quicker.

"Good heavens! the Goldendale Bank!" he gasped, and his tanned face turned almost as white as the newspaper.

Then I saw. If the bank at Goldendale had failed it would very likely be too late to redeem the false note without publicity. We might have come back too late, after all.

"We'll telegraph!" I exclaimed; and Dumoinés, seeing that something was wrong, dropped away tactfully, with a murmured appointment to meet us at the yacht that night. In my agitation I was hardly conscious of his departure.

At the nearest telegraph office I wired the landlord of the hotel where I had boarded when I was sub-editor of the *Bonanza*:

"Is the Goldendale Bank safe? Reply quick."

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In half an hour we got the reply at the office where we waited.

"Bank closed doors yesterday. Think assets good."

But they were not good enough for us. "It's all over with me," said Pill, tearing up the yellow paper. "The thing's bound to come out now. By this time they must have sent out notices to all their creditors, and Hollis knows."

"But we've got the money. We can pay it—or double it, if necessary."

"Oh, I don't suppose they'd prosecute. But it'll leak out, and there's an end of my work in Goldendale."

Pill looked at me wretchedly, his face still white and drawn. He looked twenty years older. He did not know that I might be more concerned in the danger than himself, but I wondered anxiously if Jessie had delivered my letter on the news of the bank's closing. It was not likely, and yet there was a possibility of it.

"One of us must go down there at once and find how things stand," Pill went on. "You'd better go; it's safer for you."

I was not so sure of that, and I demurred. I insisted that he should go with me.

"Well, I'll go," Pill gave way at last. "But, look here. There's no train till evening, and it's not one o'clock."

"The evening train'll put us in Goldendale long before business opens in the morning."

"Yes, but I must be there before it closes this afternoon. They'll be working at the bank till after six o'clock anyhow. We must hire a special."

"Hardly necessary," I said. "And it'll cost——"

"I don't care what it costs," Pill cried. "I'd give all I own if I could be there in five minutes."

We hurried to the railway station. To hire a special train is sufficiently easy, if one has the money in his pocket, and we still carried our locked satchels containing three hundred thousand dollars in Government paper. There

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had been no time to make any disposition of the money, and it was besides not a time to trust to banks. There was the ugly possibility that in another day's time we might be fleeing from the law, and it was better to keep the cash itself at hand.

In rather less than half an hour they brought up the engine and the single coach for which we were paying two hundred dollars, and we were off at last. Over the switch-points of the yards we rattled and banged, with a great whistling and bell-ringing, till the city was cleared, and the engine settled down to her run. The telegraph poles began to fly past faster and faster; the car rocked and reeled as we flew along, but not half fast enough to satisfy Pill's desire.

Twice he called the conductor and begged for more speed, and each time the official, who began to take a sympathetic interest in our haste, promised to have her "let out another notch," till he was at last obliged to assure us that he was making the limit of permissible speed.

One after another the little stations seemed to whiz past as we ate up the miles. I was catching the contagion of Pill's hurry. There is a keen stimulation in high speed, and I began to feel confidence in our luck once more. I thought we were sure to win after all. We were only a hundred miles from Goldendale now, and my spirits rose at every gasp of the labouring locomotive, when we suddenly slowed and stopped at a small village station.

"What's the matter with them?" Pill raged. "We were to have a straight run through."

"Taking water, perhaps," I suggested, and we were going out to look for the conductor, when we met him on the platform.

"Awfully sorry, gentlemen—can't go any farther!" he said. "There's been a bad freight wreck three miles south of here and the line's blocked. It won't be clear before midnight."

"Oh, Lord!" I groaned, and my belief in our luck crumpled.

"Why didn't they tell us of this in San Francisco? What did they mean by charg-

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ing us two hundred dollars for a train that couldn't make the journey?" shouted Pill.

"Reckon they hadn't heard of it then; it happened since noon," said the conductor. "Now I expect you gentlemen'll have to wait here till the eleven o'clock train comes down. It'll be met by a special on the other side of the wreck that'll take you on. Powerful sorry," he added. "I couldn't help it, you know. They'll refund part of the money you've paid for the special."

But the money was the least of our concerns. This final mishap struck me with an almost superstitious dread. The whole course of our adventures had been thus—apparent success, and then crushing failure at the last moment. I felt certain that when we did reach Goldendale it would be to find a warrant issued for the arrest of one of us, or, perhaps, of both.

Pill shared my forebodings to the full. We even talked of returning to San Francisco, but we finally decided to go on and face the consequences, bad as they might be.

So we waited for the eleven o'clock train, waited seven mortal hours in that barren waiting-room, guarding our fortune in bank-notes, and too full of deadly apprehension to talk. It was the longest evening I ever spent, but at last the train arrived, took us aboard and carried us down to the scene of the accident. Here we got out, walked around the smoking wreck, where a great wrecking gang was noisily at work under a blaze of portable electric lights, and we boarded the waiting special on the other side.

This proved to be anything but a fast train. It was a hastily improvised affair, hauled by a freight engine, I believe, and it was the darkest hour of the early morning when we finally reached Goldendale. For my part, I was glad of the darkness.

There was no one to recognise us at the station, and we skulked off hurriedly through the darkness, making straight for Pill's house. When we arrived at the gate there was a feeling of morning in the air, and the trees began to stand out spectrally in the im-

perceptible brightening. Pill knocked gently at the door, and I think we both remembered the last time when we had come thus knocking in the darkness.

As before, a light suddenly flashed out upstairs, and we heard soft footsteps coming down. The door opened.

"Phil! Oh, Phil!" cried Jessie, with a shriek, and her face turned white. She tottered backward, set the lamp carefully down on the stairs, then dropped beside it and burst into tears.

"What's the matter, Jess? We're all right. Is anything wrong?" Pill exclaimed, excitedly.

"N-no. I'm only so glad to see you!" Jessie sobbed, suddenly flinging her arms round her brother's neck. "Dear old Phil! I've been so worried. Have you been to the iceberg?"

"Yes. Is there any news here?" said Pill, unable to restrain his anxiety.

"Any news from the bank?" I added.

Jessie gave me an odd look. Without a

word she drew me aside into the parlour and shut the door, leaving Pill in the hall.

"Did you get my letter? Did you give them what I enclosed?" I stammered at last.

Jessie did not answer. She rummaged in a table drawer and produced a folded paper, which she handed to me. It gave me a shock of fright. I unfolded it, and saw in an instant that it was the fatal note.

"How could you have done it, Dick?" Jessie whispered in my ear. "It was to help Phil, I know—wasn't it?"

I flung my arms round her, and for a moment her head lay on my shoulder, unresistingly.

"Jessie! You angel! How did you get it?"

And I rushed out to Pill, with tears standing in my eyes.

"Here it is. Here's the accursed thing!" I shouted, and my voice broke.

"The note! Impossible! That's it, by thunder!" Pill cried, and in the sudden relief I saw him wink hard. For a moment we all three stared at each other through a triple

mist of tears, drawn from triple emotions.

"How did you get it? From Jess? How on earth did she get it?"

"I bought it from the bank," said Jessie, proudly, but in a shaky voice.

"But how did you know it was there? And how, in the name of wonder, did you get the money?"

"You men are helpless creatures, even in your own business," Jessie replied, with growing confidence. "I made the money without any difficulty at all, as soon as I needed it."

"But how?"

"Well, I had the four hundred dollars you sent me, you know. Then I sold my bees for a hundred and fifty dollars——"

"You sold your bees!" I exclaimed, knowing how dear her apiary was to her.

"I bought them back again afterwards. Then I took five hundred dollars to Lawyer Myers, because I knew that he had always looked after your affairs, and I told him that I had to have six thousand dollars at once. He wouldn't advise me at first, but at last I

got him to say that he would sell wheat short if he wanted to turn over his money quickly. I didn't know quite what he meant to do, but I made him handle the money for me. He said he was taking a flier in wheat himself.

"Wheat was at nearly two dollars a bushel, you know. There was some kind of a corner at Chicago. It kept going up all one day, and I was frightened; then it stopped and jumped about, first up and then down, and then I went down—down—down, till I thought it would never stop. Lots of Goldendale people have lost fortunes, they say. But I didn't. Lawyer Myers told me that he was pyramiding, whatever that is, and anyway he bought back the wheat that I had sold, and brought me seven thousand and two hundred dollars. He wanted me to buy more for a rise in price, but I had all the money I wanted, and I wouldn't. Then I went to the bank with the money and got that paper. I've been keeping it for you. Please burn it—it's terrible."

Pill lit a match, and the dangerous document curled up into a black cinder.

"Jess, you're a brick!" said Pill, solemnly, regarding his sister with round eyes.

For myself, I was struck with stupefaction at the recital of so much nerve and devotion, to say nothing of the good luck! I did not notice that she had failed to make one point clear in her story, but Pill had been struck by it.

"But how did you come to know anything at all about the thing?" he inquired. "Did Dick——?" casting a suspicious glance at me.

"No—no. It was the letter——" Jessie began, and hesitated.

"What letter?" Pill demanded.

"Never mind that, Pill," I interposed. "Jessie, you must have opened the enclosure I asked you to deliver on a certain date."

"Well, you know a woman isn't supposed to have any sense of honour," said Jessie, with rising colour. "But you had written to me that it was a question of your honour, and no woman would hesitate to open any letter, if she knew that the honour was at stake of the

man she—the man she might forgive,” she finished, almost inaudibly.

And she passed behind Pill, slipped an arm round him, and hid her head on his shoulder.

“But,” she added, raising it all flushed for an instant, “I didn’t open the letter. You had forgotten to seal it.”

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